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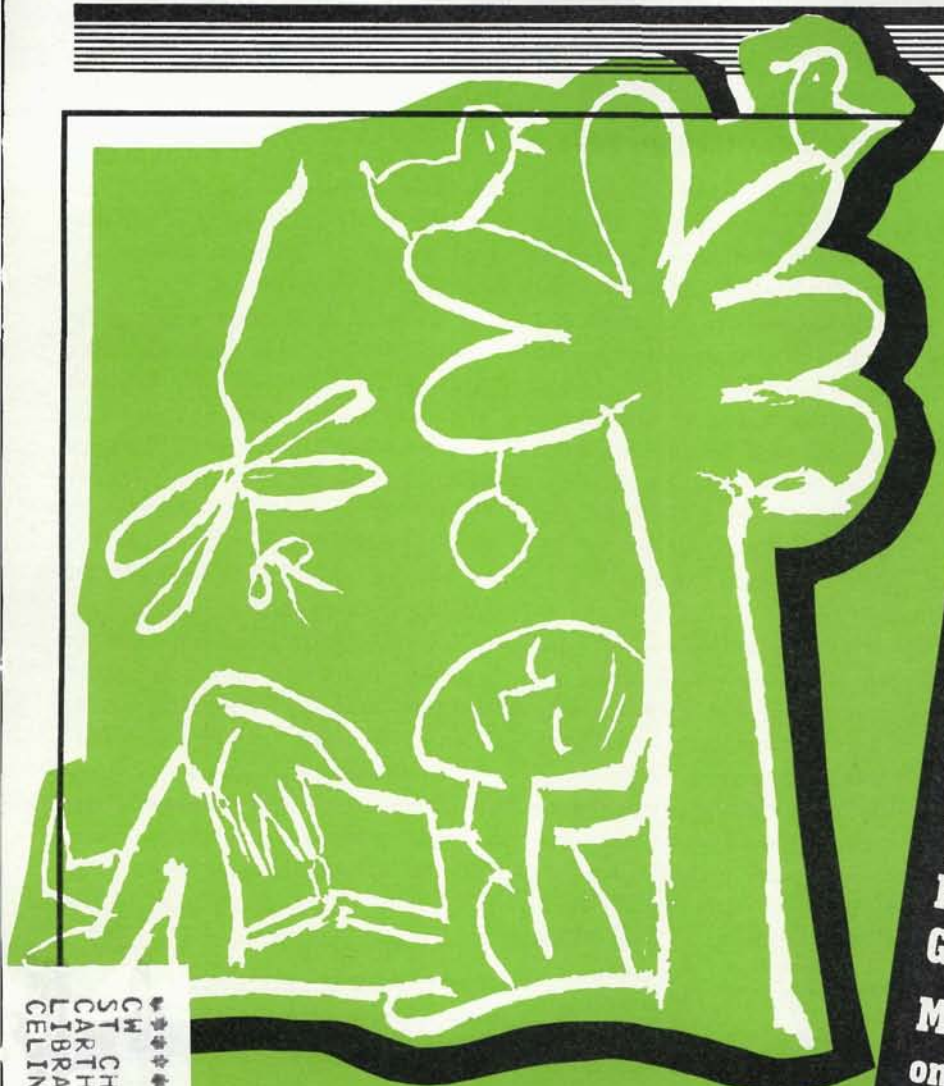

SPRING BOOKS

RAND RICHARDS COOPER on Ann Beattie

DON WYCLIFF on Andrew Greeley

RICHARD WIGHTMAN FOX on Glenn Tinder

MADELINE MARGET on Iris Murdoch

THOMAS HIGGINS on Daniel Callahan

CHRISTIAN APPY on Richard J. Barnet

PEGGY R. ELLSBERG on Beverly Coyle

THOMAS E. BRINKMAN, Jr. on baseball

THE PARADOXES OF COVENANT HOUSE

Rosanne Haggerty Redmond
Mark Redmond
and the Editors

Frank McConnell on 'TWIN PEAKS'

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CORRESPONDENCE

Howe we forgot

New Haven, Conn.

To the Editors: It's a good Religious Book Issue this year [March 9]; I profited, as always. However, Gertrude Nelson's piece contains what might be called an error. Perhaps Catholic periodicals have not published any of Fanny Howe's poems or novels—but *Commonweal* at least has not ignored her. I reviewed her first collection, *Eggs*, myself—in June 1971!

MARGARET WIMSATT

Reforming the call

Watertown, Mass.

To the Editors: Goodness knows those of us who are starved for renewal in the church are sympathetic to the frustrations of the Call to Action petitioners. Yet, like the editors, I too have hesitated to sign the document. The thoughtful critique that appeared in *Commonweal* [April 20] pointed out to me the source of my own reluctance.

During Lent, I taught a renewal program. Our "textbook" was the documents of Vatican II. The inevitable subjects came up during the course: birth control, female acolytes, women's ordination, etc. It was assumed these are the things which are causing people to leave the church. Actually, I told the class, I see my own contemporaries leaving over quite different issues, issues that have more to do with the faith than with ecclesiastical policy.

It is the loss of the sense of the holy, as the editors point out, and the lack of a vibrant community of believers in which to nourish the faith, that is at the heart of our present difficulties ....

I may decide to sign the petition but, thanks to your fine editorial, will do so with an eye toward seeing that the spiritual roots of reform are not neglected by my fellow visionaries.

ELLEN CHRIS FANIZZI

Editors' note: A selection of letters from readers responding to recent editorials on abortion and to Governor Mario Cuomo's letter [March 23] will be published in the issue of June 1.

Bass notes will prevail

Milwaukee, Wis.

To the Editors: Commonweal had good reason to criticize the Call to Action manifesto for church reform [editorial, April 20] as a kind of undifferentiated and, by now, repetitive canon grinding away on unresolved hopes of Vatican II. But underneath the Call there lies a consistent bourdon that may well become the main theme: participation by the baptized in the decisions that affect their lives and the church they love, and not just an active/passive reception/nonreception of the same.

Even for this pedal point we all hope that some boundaries would be set, lest congregationalism or rule by majority cause a disconcerting cipher in the church. This theme, because it is more about style or method of exercising authority than about content, should not be easily dismissed. The drone, it is clear, will not go away of itself. The pipes can, of course, be stuffed or taken out so they do not sound, but the problem will continue to return. In fact, as Eastern Europe begins to enjoy its new political freedom, it will join the church chorus for more flexibility of interpretation.

If nothing else, the Call to Action has made a significant contribution by calling us to listen to that unfulfilled hope for new participatory models concerning crucial issues. We must take the cry seriously, even if the shrill upper register seems to dominate at this moment over the more muffled but, I sense, more significant ground bass.

REMBERT G. WEAKLAND, O.S.B.

The writer is archbishop of Milwaukee, and a musician. For readers who are neither, a canon is like unto a fugue or round; a bourdon is an organ stop that specializes in low notes.

A strong call

Dunkirk, Md.

To the Editors: Though I was one of the 4,505 signers of the Call for Reform ad in the *New York Times*, it doesn't bother me at all that anyone would not wish to sign. But if *Commonweal* is going to bring up the subject, I'd expect better criticisms than those you gave ["A Call for Reflection," April 20].

I like to speculate about which of the "old masters" would have signed. I'd bet my family faux pearls that Thomas Merton would have signed, publicly. Teilhard de Chardin would sign, quietly. Jacques Maritain, Mother Teresa, Walker Percy—heavens, no. Karl Rahner, probably; if not, he'd give good reasons. It's my sincere gut feeling that John XXIII would get a happy chuckle out of the Call.

Your most baffling criticism is that the statement is focused on organizational structures and lacks a sense of the sacred. I think it is focused on social justice, fairness, reasonableness, and an evolving understanding of Christ's message. These come from love of the church and one another....Though I belong to two of the organizations supporting the Call, I know

(Continued on page 332)

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COMMONWEAL 65

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Renewing the covenant

In the face of mounting allegations of sexual wrongdoing and financial improprieties, the Rev. Bruce Ritter, O.F.M. Conv., resigned as president of Covenant House February 28. Ritter continues to deny any wrongdoing. Nevertheless, with donations plummeting and public confidence shattered, Covenant House, the nation's largest shelter program for runaway and homeless children, may be teetering toward collapse. It is now clear that, when and if that happens, the tragic flaws that brought the agency to this sorry pass were both personal and institutional.

You will read in the following pages more about those flaws and the true nature of Covenant House's failures. But first a word of explanation. Rosanne Haggerty Redmond and Mark Redmond, the authors of "The Paradoxes of Covenant House" (pp. 311-316), did not come to us with their story—we went to them. That was early in March. We knew they had worked at Covenant House and suggested the possibility of their writing a first-hand account that would go beyond the stereotypes of the newspaper and TV coverage.

A series of conversations with the Redmonds followed. The more we heard, the more we knew Covenant House's story needed telling and the Redmonds were the ones to tell it. They had a more difficult decision to make. For them, writing honestly about Covenant House seemed to involve an element of betrayal. Covenant House was not just a worthy cause for them; it had been a formative part of their lives. In the end, the Redmonds judged, as Muriel Spark wrote (in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*), that "it's only possible to betray where loyalty is due." Indeed, they judged that continued silence about Ritter and the program meant betraying the children they wanted to help.

How did Covenant House become vulnerable to such personal and financial excesses? The answers are both technical and subtle: a misguided preference for large-scale operations and publicity over less glamorous alternatives; a shocking neglect and manipulation of its own staff; an essentially monarchical corporate structure that was allowed to function without accountability; an arrogance and willingness to stretch the truth; and, most dismaying, a willingness to use and be used by those whose political agenda conspicuously ignored the chronic social and economic problems that made Covenant House necessary in the first place.

For Catholics, the tragedy engulfing Ritter seems to have a parallel in the hypocrisies of evangelists Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker. We are reminded once again not to confuse priests with saints, or for that matter, saints with social workers. Where, we now ask, were the procedures of accountability? Where was the church whose collar Ritter wore so proudly?

Covenant House's current administrators admit that a too "deferential" attitude was taken toward the inspirational priest, and that the $88-million-a-year enterprise

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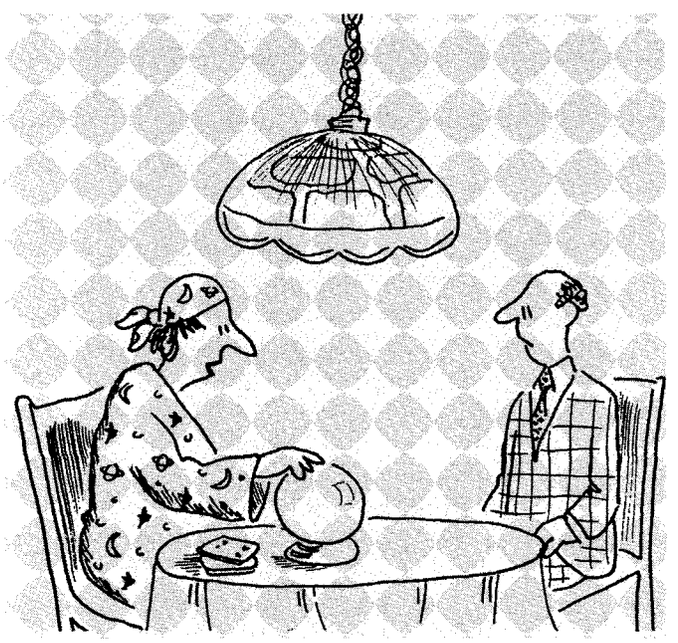
was run in an unorthodox fashion. To some extent the very nature of Covenant House made such mismanagement inevitable. Ritter's charisma and moral authority provided the energy and vision that propelled the agency to prominence. For various and complex reasons, literally millions of people came to trust him. It is an old story: unconstrained, Ritter's compelling gifts led to folly.

How could Ritter and Covenant House have been made more accountable? That's not easy to say. A certain freedom and flexibility need to be preserved in church-related institutions. The church's autonomy keeps the doors open, cuts administrative costs, and helps to attract dedicated, talented workers. Free from the bureaucratic, legal, and political compromises inherent in government programs, the church can have a more immediate impact on problems. All that having been said, some better method of oversight must be developed without sacrificing the benefits of independence.

Ritter's Franciscan community appears to have been especially negligent in monitoring his activities. Surely much of Ritter's appeal, and the foundation upon which contributors' trust was built, derived from his status as a priest and a Franciscan. It is more than a bitter irony that Ritter felt he could control a private $900,000 trust fund and wield nearly dictatorial power over a multimillion-dollar enterprise and still be faithful to the religious ideals of humility, poverty, and obedience. Did anyone think to remind him of these priestly obligations?

Furthermore, whatever the truth of the specific sexual allegations against Ritter, the church needs to confront forthrightly those clergy who abuse the trust so many place in them. Such sexual delinquency has done enormous damage to the individuals involved and to the credibility of the institution. Some dioceses have set clear policies and have dealt openly and honestly with particular incidents. Others have been scandalously evasive.



"When is the last time you had a complete metaphysical?"

In the Covenant House case, as in too many others, the church has failed to take care of its own; failed to keep its own house in order. Is it any wonder, then, that efforts to speak truth to power on issues such as abortion and economic justice are greeted with suspicion, if not disdain, by the secular world? If the idea of spiritual authority is to survive—an idea much needed in a world awash with "experts"—churchmen must demonstrate both a reasoned and a passionate reticence when assuming the mantle of worldly power. Even in the age of computerized, direct-mail solicitation, it is worth remembering that a good shepherd rescues his sheep one at a time. No one man, regardless of his talents or virtue, should be given unchecked dominion over an $88-million pasture.

A degree of disillusionment is inevitable in the wake of this episode, but a merely cynical response will do nothing for the children and youth who are in such great need. The Redmonds take pains to acknowledge the good that has been accomplished at Covenant House, sometimes by heroic means, and they express the hope that the agency will emerge from its current crisis with a more effective program and a deeper understanding of the structures that generate despair and result in wasted lives. We second that acknowledgement and share that hope.

A BAD MOVE

"One expects the central shrine of Christendom to stand out in majestic isolation, but anonymous buildings cling to it like barnacles. One looks for numinous light, but it is dark and cramped. One hopes for peace, but the ear is assailed by a cacophony of warring chants. One desires holiness, only to encounter a jealous possessiveness: the six groups of occupants—Latin Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Armenians, Syrians, Copts, Ethiopians—watch one another suspicously for any infringement of rights. The frailty of man is nowhere more apparent than here; it epitomizes the human condition." Thus Jerome Murphy-O'Connor on Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre (*The Holy Land*, Oxford, 1980), the site venerated as Jesus' burial place, and which, as these things are measured in the Middle East, is but a stone's throw from St. John's Hospice in the old city (divided by tradition into Christian, Armenian, Muslim, and Jewish quarters).

St. John's, a four-building complex that lies in the Christian quarter, was occupied by Jewish seminary students and their families on Wednesday of Holy Week. It is owned by the Greek Orthodox church, but was sublet through its Armenian lessee to the settlers through circuitous arrangments designed to hide the group's true identity. The occupation was followed on Holy Thursday by a protest that included a Greek Orthodox priest removing the Star of David placed to cover the Greek Cross on the entrance door. The demonstration ended with Israeli soldiers tear-gassing the protestors. Subsequently the Israeli ministry of housing has admitted to helping finance the $4 million lease with $1.8 million. This small incident, in a land with far larger

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and more intractable problems, is symptomatic not only of the defensive sense of territoriality endemic to the Holy Land and alluded to by Murphy-O'Connor, but also of the unbridled jingoism with which a small group of extremists is driving Israeli policy.

Ariel Sharon, who provoked similar reactions when he took up residence in the Muslim quarter (a building now replete with a giant Menorah and an Israeli flag displayed on its roof), was on hand to support the settlers and to provoke more ill-will among Christians and Muslims, who live in the old city. Sharon, who left the right-wing Likud government over Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's feeble, but now abandoned, support for a peace process, is positioning himself to take that right wing ever further right. At the same time, our own Congress was busying itself passing a nonbinding resolution to make Jerusalem the capital of Israel, despite U.S. policy which appropriately sees the status of Jerusalem as finally being settled through a peace treaty with the Palestinians. By its vote Congress contributes to the bellicose direction of Israeli policy.

There is a school of thought that says things must get worse in Israel before they can get better. It is true that full-scale civil war has not broken out, that there is a significant peace movement, that there are solid contacts, cultural and political, between some Israelis and some Palestinians, that 22 percent of Israeli voters have signed a petition demanding reform of the electoral system—in other words things are not yet as bad as they could be.

There are, indeed, many ways in which things could get worse without anyone half trying: Shamir could form a new government that would support further settlements in the West Bank, Gaza, and previously restricted areas of the old city; Soviet Jewish emigrants could overwhelm the capacity of Israel to absorb them while providing many potential votes to the right-wing coalition; worst of all, the chance for peace with the Palestinians could pass. Things could get so bad that even the Congress of the United States might begin to think about its uncritical support for Israel and its $3-4 billion subvention. By the time things get that bad, we are afraid that it will be too late for the U.S. to exercise whatever leverage it may have, and too late for Israel to grasp the opportunity for peace now offered by moderate Palestinians. Things have been getting bad in Israel—and the Occupied Territories—for too many years without any evidence that getting worse leads to getting better.

The occupation of St. John's Hospice was patently wrong and so provocative as to be potentially explosive—the more so, of course, because of the Israeli government's hidden collusion in the action. The standard rationale for such behavior is the fractionated state of Israeli politics: to get or keep a majority in the Knesset, it is said, any Israeli coalition needs votes from extremist groups, and will therefore wink at or connive in their endless challenge to Israel's democracy.

The accuracy of this perception isn't all that clear; in recent years, in our view, it has not been adequately tested by acts of courage on the part of mainstream Israeli politicians. In any case, it needs to be balanced by a counter-perception. There is no reason why Americans should be complicit in Israel's heedless, potentially suicidal course. There is no reason why Republicans and Democrats in Congress should join Labor and the Likud in the Knesset as hostages to zealots who owe no loyalty to the best of the Zionist vision, who view any concession to the Palestinians as too great a price to pay for peace, and who look upon not only Palestinians but other groups as intruders on their sacred turf.

Blind congressional advocacy of any official Israeli policy however dubious does not serve U.S. interests, the cause of peace, or the future stability of Israel. It sends the wrong message. It does not accurately represent the state of public opinion in this country, or in Israel. An opportunity now exists to send a different message. Americans of all political and religious groupings should urge Congress to condition current appropriation bills upon Israel's agreement to end new settlements in the Occupied Territories and previously restricted areas of the old city. Any such step will be described as an unwarranted intervention in Israel's domestic affairs. But: we are already profoundly involved in those affairs. The use of funds from the U.S. Treasury is a domestic concern of Americans. And peace in the Middle East is not an exclusively Israeli matter.

OF SEVERAL MINDS John Garvey

A DELUGE OF IMAGES

WHY WORRY ABOUT MAPPLETHORPE?

So many of the arguments over such things as the Mapplethorpe exhibit and the limits, or lack of them, on the distribution of pornography deal with subject matter: is this photograph or that movie or book offensive or not? What does "offensive" really mean? Should something terribly offensive be censored, or the subject of boycotts? Arguments on this set of subjects typically gather around the question of free speech: what are its limits, and should there be any legal limits at all? My own prejudice is in favor of a libertarian approach—the alternatives seem more dangerous than tolerance.

My concern here is not really with law, but with culture. For there seems to me to be a distinction which, whatever the law does about these things, we have often failed to take into account. Discussions of pornography frequently concentrate on subject matter (understandably), but they slight crucial differences between the visual image and the word.

I don't think we are sufficiently aware of how radically different the past few centuries have been, with regard to images and the power they have in our lives, from all the rest of human history, and how dif-

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ferent in turn the past few decades have been from those centuries.

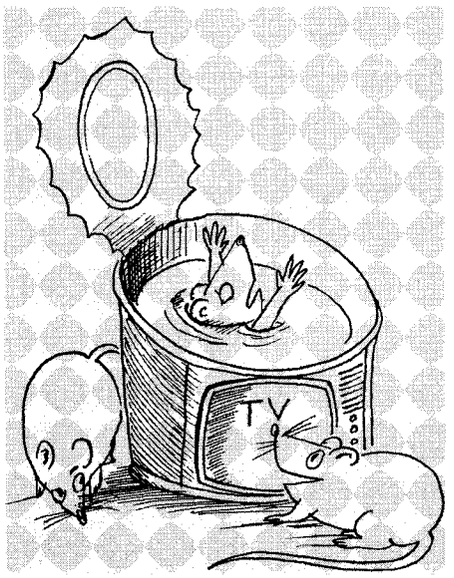
Think of the time before the printing press and movable type. Images in the lives of most people were encountered as part of the common culture—on the walls of churches or temples, or in some important public areas—and in some cultures (Islamic and Jewish) the representation of the human image was forbidden. In Christian homes there might or might not be a cross or an icon; there were no illustrated books—for that matter, in most homes there were no books at all.

The image was, compared to our time, a relatively rare thing, and had a focus and deliberate significance: it was meant to elevate, to remind the viewer of something that mattered to all. Occasionally, especially in the case of architectural decoration, it was intended to amuse. With the invention of the printing press and, later, movable type, pictures and books became more available and the use of the image broadened and became, in a sense, more secularized: now it was not only the sacred, the agreed-upon important things, that images represented. With the coming of the poster and the broadside and the newspaper, images could be used to mock or challenge as well as elevate, and images produced for amusement alone—the disposable image—became more common.

The past few decades have seen the development of photography, cinema, videocassettes, and the presence of television in varying degrees of concentration everywhere throughout the world. Images reflect every sort of fantasy and aspiration; they are produced to sell us products and politicians, and to move us at every level from the humorous to the erotic. The most ancient, sacred role of the image is now its least frequently encountered manifestation.

While the image has undergone a steady evolution, and its role has changed, the word has remained a more constant thing. Although many languages have "high" and "low" dialects, and the vernacular was considered for a while inferior to Greek or Latin, language of some sort was always a common possession. Before the broadside, before the possibility of the secularization of the image, there were stories, some of them frightening, some amusing, some obscene, some edifying. There were jokes. Words did have a sacred form, corresponding to the icon, in the Bible and in the prayers sung at churches and in synagogues. But because language is one of the essential things about being human and is common to all of us, the word had a less circumscribed, more unfettered role than the image. Words were produced by everyone and had more to do with dailiness; they always had a common and secular, as well as sacred, use. Images, on the other hand, were crafted by the minority capable of doing so, usually for religous reasons.

While there is a major difference between the written word (it is more like an image) and the spoken word, language



of either sort carries its own interpretation in a way the image does not; language—except perhaps the immediate language of the curse, which is a kind of verbal blow—strikes us less directly. We are ordinarily more helpless before images, more passive. Words engage us in another way, one which calls on a different range of responses. The image comes to us in a way at once direct and ambivalent. An image has a halo of possible associations, combined with a direct presence. If I tell you that a man murders his lover's mother and tosses her head into his lover's lap, in my telling I will offer a distance and (either through a cold, factual description of the deed, or by employing a tone of outrage, or of terrible glee) an interpretation. If I show you the action itself, on film or in photographs, your reaction will be significantly different (though I assume you will disapprove of the deed in any case).

This is not to say that there are not different ways of showing; but the effect of words, and of depiction in images, differs. A description in a novel of the acts shown in the most controversial Mapplethorpe photographs would affect us differently, and less immediately, than the images themselves. This is, no doubt, one of the reasons pornographic movies and photo magazines have aroused more controversy, at least in recent years, than pornographic novels. The story says, "This is what it was like," where the photo says, "this is what it is." They may both lie, in their ways, but they affect us differently.

We don't yet know what effect the glut of images, the storm of impressions drenching us from our earliest days, will have over the long haul. The phenomenon is too new, and we are all too entangled in it. My own feeling is that both the violence and the drug abuse that pervade our culture have a lot to do with this deluge; so do the unreal expectations so many of us have for how life ought to be, and the desire to make things more simple and uncomplicated than they ever can be. (Happiness, regarded as a right, is what most of us hope for—not joy, which we do not understand—and we find happiness impossible to obtain.) The power of the image, a power as established in us as the ability to see, is commonly debased and cheapened and manipulated, and at the same time the power of the image to move and mold us is more powerful than at any other time in human history.

I can't say what, if anything, the law can or should do about any of these things, and don't have much hope that law can deal very well with any of our most important problems. Still, a perception, however dim, of the power of the image and this relatively recent shift in what images have meant, combined with a fear of our inability to see where it will lead, may be the reason so many people worry about things like X-rated videos, the controversial Mapplethorpe photographs, the shallowness of political television advertising, and the banality of television programming. The reactions may often be inappropriate or hysterical, but the worry is grounded in a disturbing reality. □

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THE PARADOXES OF COVENANT HOUSE

MYTHMAKING & LIVESAVING

ROSANNE HAGGERTY REDMOND
MARK REDMOND

Tommy called us not long ago. He had successfully completed a drug rehabilitation program in North Carolina, was living down there with his sister, and was looking for a job. For once, he sounded optimistic about his life. Since we met Tommy at Covenant House in New York City eight years ago, he has spent time in a series of shelters, prisons, and drug rehab programs. After discussing his current prospects, Tommy got to the point of his call. "What's going on with Father Bruce and Covenant House?" he demanded. "That's a good place. They helped me out, they help a lot of people. How could Father Bruce be in trouble?"

Like so many homeless young people in New York, Tommy had found at Covenant House not just shelter and attention to his immediate needs, but an atmosphere of genuine caring. He spoke of Covenant House with great fondness and of the child-care staff he came to know in the course of his many stays at the shelter—one month in, one month out for a number of years—as the best people he knew.

It has been difficult for the many supporters of Covenant House to accept that there could be any truth to the serious charges leveled in recent months against the agency and its founder and president, the Rev. Bruce Ritter, O.F.M. Conv. The recent avalanche of allegations of financial improprieties, unprofessional conduct, nepotism, and managerial arrogance presents an extraordinary paradox: How could so popular a charity, so celebrated for its good works, be guilty of such misdeeds? Particularly shocking are the allegations that Ritter, one of the nation's most outspoken advocates for sexually exploited young people, may have been guilty of such exploitation.

The paradox of Covenant House—being at its best so exceptional in its vision, and now seeming to be so malignant—is an occasion for serious reflection. How should religious and charitable agencies conduct themselves? How should they be held accountable? Needless to say, these are especially painful and sobering questions for the Catholic church.

We have been deeply troubled by the institutional values of Covenant House since we both worked at the main Covenant House program in New York City's Times Square in the early 1980s. At that time the agency's reputation was growing, donations were pouring in, and Covenant House was expanding into a number of North American cities. But like many others there, we found our experience at Covenant House an ambivalent and finally a disillusioning one.

Despite our personal disappointment, we remained hopeful over the years that the agency would find a true course, and that the undeniable virtues of the place would eventually triumph. When Covenant House first came under public scrutiny in December 1989 following allegations of sexual and financial misconduct against Father Ritter, we hoped the crisis might be a transforming moment. Believing that Ritter and the agency could examine and correct themselves, one of us even joined with other former Covenant House volunteers in writing to the agency's board of directors. At that point, it seemed Ritter should be allowed to continue leading the agency if the charges of misconduct could not be substantiated.

But when the initial charges were followed with disclosures of apparently self-interested financial dealings and further charges of sexual misconduct, what dogged faith we had for the agency was all but destroyed. Our bleak view turned to outrage when Ritter and his loyalists on the board forced the ouster of acting president Frank J. Macchiarola following Macchiarola's call for a full investigation of the agency's operations as the first step in a program of reform.

We were struck by a phrase used by Macchiarola, a man we know and respect, in explaining his forced resignation. "I was the guy holding the light," he said. "They [Ritter and the board] said, 'Hey, it's too bright in here.'" Macchiarola's statement prompted us to turn the light on our own experiences at Covenant

ROSANNE HAGGERTY REDMOND *and* MARK REDMOND *are former members of the Covenant House Community. He served as the first director of the community and on a variety of Covenant House advisory groups. She worked in child-care services, donor communications, and as a researcher in Covenant House's Institute for Youth Advocacy. Both continue their work in social services: Mark Redmond is a housing and operations administrator at a New York City church-affiliated child-care organization; Rosanne Haggerty Redmond is on the staff of Becker and Becker and works with nonprofit New York City agencies to develop housing for the homeless.*

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House.

We were members of the Covenant Community from 1981 to 1983. Made up of full-time volunteers, the community had been established by Father Ritter as an element of the Covenant House program in 1977. Like many others in this faith-centered group, we were just out of college, idealistic, curious about the role that faith would play in our lives, and drawn there by Ritter's challenge: "Give me a year of your life to help me help my kids." Among the seventy or so community members, there were widows, retired people, and priests and nuns on temporary assignment from their dioceses or religious communities. A Methodist minister was part of our group. Several members came from backgrounds in child care, parish ministry, nursing, and even the military.

Each member was assigned a full-time job at Covenant House's main facility in Times Square. The building housed the residential programs on the lower levels, and the agency's corporate offices on four floors above the crisis center. Most community members worked with the residents as child-care staff, but several were assigned to other areas of the program. We received a stipend of $12 a week in addition to room and board at a dilapidated complex of buildings at 44th Street and 8th Avenue. From the community dining room, we could look out in one direction and see the marquees for a live-sex show, two peep shows, a porn book store, a prostitution hotel, and the sidewalk in front of these lined with dazed, pleading women and boys. The view in the other direction was of the Broadway theaters along 44th Street, and of the limousines depositing their affluent fares just yards from scenes of degradation and suffering, of which the theatergoers seemed thoroughly unaware. We would often debate which of the views was more alarming.

Community members prayed together three times daily, went on two retreats during the year, and met weekly as a group to discuss issues of community living. At those meetings, we would talk about our work with the kids, and about our shared experiences. We would debate the meaning of "simple living" and "chaste love," the two tenets of our community life as established by Father Ritter, and discuss, at his encouragement, the possibility of the community's eventual autonomy from Covenant House. With Ritter, we imagined that such a community might become a new type of presence in the Catholic church: an intentional community of lay people devoted to the care of runaway and homeless youth, who would make a permanent commitment to live in community and contribute to the work of the church.

Our own work experiences at Covenant House were quite varied. We each spent time as child-care workers. One of us spent two months working in Donor Communications, where personal responses were prepared to each letter written to Father Ritter. This was followed by an assignment doing research at Covenant House's Institute for Youth Advocacy, where the experience of the agency was to be analyzed and used to develop a legislative agenda and social policy positions based on the needs and circumstances of the residents. The other of us directed the High School/College Program, through which Covenant House presented information about its growing network of shelters. This was followed by a year directing the development and operations of the growing faith community.

In each of these roles we acquired a profound appreciation for the passionate good will of Covenant House's supporters. In legislative offices and in schools throughout the country, and in hundreds of thousands of homes, people had heard and responded to Ritter's uniquely effective appeal to help the children of Times Square.

It is difficult to cite an exact moment when we realized that the emperor had few clothes. Among the first signs was how callously the agency treated its child-care staff. At full-time salaries of under $11,000, most child-care staff were themselves in a grim battle for economic survival in New York City. Equally troubling was the atmosphere of fear and intimidation created by management. Even in situations where residents and staff were at risk, workers' crisis judgments were frequently undermined and challenged. Managers rarely visited the residential floors and had little comprehension of or sympathy for the day-to-day struggles of the staff to keep order and provide care. Firings occurred as if at whim. Sadly, the "covenant" did not extend to the line staff. Among the most pathetic of the recent revelations on Covenant House finances was the disclosure that when fundraising projections were not met in 1987, rather than tighten belts on the corporate side or scale back expansion plans, Covenant House canceled the health benefits of its child-care workers, at an annual savings of $80,000 out of a budget that year of over $75 million.

As the months went by, there were other signs of a gap between the "myth" of Covenant House and the reality we were living. It seemed an obvious conflict that a member of the board of directors was also a paid employee of the agency, and that one of our offices had purchased an obsolete piece of business machinery at a premium from another of Ritter's close advisers. There was growing evidence of profligate spending: jobs created for favorites of Ritter in the executive offices; people being flown all over the continent to examine new sites for expansion; frequent redecorations of the executive offices and the center (under the paid supervision of Ritter's niece); a top-heavy and disproportionately well-paid corporate staff. We questioned the propriety of Ritter's elevating a number of young men into positions of management responsibility for which they had few qualifications, and the total absence of women or those with professional experience in child care within the agency's decision-making circle.

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A particularly distressing moment came while working in Donor Communications. It was just before Christmas, and the agency was flooded with mail. One letter was from a young widow. Her husband had been killed in a traffic accident that fall, and at the request of her two young children, she was sending Ritter all the money she had saved during the year to buy her own children's gifts, as "a Christmas present to Daddy." We thought especially of the faith and sacrifices of that family—who were so typical of many Covenant House supporters—when, soon after, the agency commissioned a lavish and costly redecoration of the lobby, lounge, and executive offices at its main building.

Our unease grew deeper when discussions about autonomy for the faith community were cut off by Ritter. It had been proposed that the community's mission might be broadened from work with runaway and homeless children, to include other ministries. Hearing this, Ritter met with us to announce that he would not allow the community to influence in any way the public image of Covenant House. He said he had "a very conservative donor base," who would be alienated were Covenant House, through the community, to be identified with the peace and justice movement within the church. He informed us further that Covenant House, and within it the community, was legally his corporation. There would be no more discussion; he made the rules. Ritter insisted on absolute control of every element of Covenant House, and did not hesitate to eliminate even perceived challenges to his authority.

As our idealism began to dissipate, Covenant House itself became as disorienting and morally ambiguous an environment as Times Square. Walking home from the center at night after a child-care shift, through the human wasteland of 42nd Street, we would offer thanks for the existence of Covenant House, that so many young people were there and not out on the streets. At those moments the agency's questionable practices seemed not to matter much in the face of so much misery and degradation relieved only, it appeared, by the presence of Covenant House.

What made Covenant House such a phenomenon in social services was not simply its genius at fundraising, but its ability to strike connections among people, to create deep mutual bonds between the largely middle-class, Catholic, suburban donors who support Covenant House, and the poor urban youth the program serves. No other private or church-sponsored charity compares with Covenant House's success in this area.

We were often approached by individuals who knew we worked at Covenant House. They asked eagerly about the program, and described how moved they were by Ritter's monthly newsletter. Their pleasure at being informed of the work, introduced to presumably archetypal residents, told of major developments in the program, and given the lurid details of the dangerous underworld of sex and violence lurking outside Covenant House's doors, revealed a complex chemistry at work. At their best, the newsletters created an ongoing dialogue with the donors, acknowledging their ownership of the program, their "right to know" what was happening and how their donations were being spent. The letters were very personal in tone, highly emotional, and both despairing and humble in their actual request for contributions.

An important factor in the loyal relationships Covenant House established with its donors was the agency's attention to simple courtesies and its thoughtful treatment of its supporters. Every contribution received a thank you; every donor was invited to visit the centers; every donor received an invitation to Mass at Christmas and Easter in the faith community chapel, followed by receptions stocked with baked goods prepared in biannual frenzies by community members. Most impressively, Covenant House maintained an entire office of correspondents who would answer each letter the agency received from its supporters. Often, the letters were requests for prayers for ill or troubled family members. Frequently, donors were writing to Ritter as the only priest or counselor they knew and trusted during their own times of struggle.

But at their worst, the newsletters were intentionally misleading, manipulative, and prurient. Shortly after leaving Covenant House, we met a woman who had just received her first Covenant House direct mail solicitation. She described how deeply offended she was by the "lascivious quality of the message." She was dead right. The newsletters, for the most part, presented extreme cases of young people caught in the sex industry. The language evoked darkly fascinating images of young bodies and neon lights. Though undeniably compelling, there was a voyeuristic undercurrent to the stories that used the sexual history of the residents to titillate readers. Despite their effectiveness as fundraising tools, the newsletters themselves exploited the subjects of the stories.

Through the monthly newsletter, Father Ritter won an intensely loyal following, and convinced his supporters both of his expertise in dealing with troubled youth, and of the freshness and humility of his organization. It often astonished us to hear from donors, who knew Covenant House strictly through the mail, that they believed they were supporting a small, nontraditional charity that spent all its resources directly "on the kids." This image was somehow sustained through Covenant House's meteoric growth in the 1980s into one of the nation's largest, most conservative charities, which spent vast sums on administration and fundraising.

Most compelling for the white, middle-class, suburban donor, however, was the profile Covenant House presented of the residents themselves. The agency promoted itself as a haven for runaways who, but for Covenant House, would almost inescapably be dragged into a life of prostitution. The residents, as most newsletter stories read, were white and middle-class teens, running naively from some adolescent trauma into the grasp of pimps and johns who stalked Times Square and the Port Authority Bus Terminal. Posters, brochures, and other agency advertisements, including the widely circulated fundraising booklet "Sometimes God Has a Kid's Face," featured young, white men and women, usually fair-haired and often carrying a backpack. Few donors could miss the message that "this could be your child."

The superficiality of this portrait of the residents and their

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actual circumstances was the original and foremost fiction adopted by the agency. Much of the trouble revealed lately grew out of this fundamental falsehood of the popular Covenant House mythology. The myth of Ritter as savior to our worst, most fallen selves—the savior of the inadequate parent whose child has run away, the enemy of the urban underworld that guiltily fascinates us as it repulses us, the righteous banner carrier of our traditional Catholic moral values in the dark arenas of the street—was a distortion. That falsehood became ever easier to justify and manipulate once the agency's multimillion dollar operating budgets were built on its popularity.

All forces but the truth then conspired to enlarge and sustain this great myth. As donations grew, Covenant House directors became more and more impatient with those within the agency who objected to this false portrayal. In taking license with the facts, Covenant House managers openly rationalized that the agency's largely white donors would be unlikely to support a program for primarily black and Hispanic young people.

In the early days of his work, Ritter apparently did work mainly with white teenage runaways. But by the early 1980s, when our involvement with Covenant House began, over 85 percent of the residents at Covenant House's flagship program in Times Square were black or Hispanic, and victims of far more complex evils than the sex industry. Most had been raised in poverty. Many had been abused physically or sexually in their homes. Most were in poor health, undereducated, untrained, and unemployable. Many had grown up in foster care and had been discharged at age eighteen to fend for themselves. Most came from the five boroughs of New York City, and from the city's most troubled communities. There was no promise of reunification with family for these young people, no better life to return to from Covenant House.

There is a young underclass in our society with acute needs. That their circumstances are largely unknown is partly the result of the deliberate obfuscations of Covenant House. Covenant House found it had tapped a golden flow when it promoted the image of the white runaway exploited by the merchants of sex. It was a simpler and more comfortable message of good and evil than the ugly and unsettling truth of abuse perpetrated by family members, homelessness, illiteracy, racism, chronic poverty, and the general breakdown of family and community life, particularly in inner city neighborhoods. We learned in our work with residents that the sex industry merely preyed on the already vanquished, the victims of other evils. For most young people, involvement in the sex industry was a result of the impoverishment and abuse they had grown up with.

A steady stream of local, state, and national political leaders visited Covenant House. They were told—and left believing—that the greatest needs of disenfranchised youth were for more shelters like Covenant House and stronger antipornography legislation. Covenant House distanced itself from the advocacy agenda of virtually every other social service agency serving young people—for help to troubled and abusive families, affordable housing, increased job training opportunities, and better supports in schools and poor communities to prevent or treat problems early. While we were there, Covenant House's own legislative agenda was focused almost exclusively on promoting politically inoffensive measures to regulate and penalize the distribution of child pornography. Covenant House consistently and consciously placed the sensitivities of its middle-class donor base and its conservative, politically well-connected friends above the imperative to truthfully reveal the economic and social conditions which were destroying Covenant House residents.

Both the Reagan and Bush administrations loved to point to Covenant House as exactly the type of narrow, privatized social service program they had in mind in proposing that volunteers could solve our nation's most intractable social problems, rather than professionals using public resources. Perhaps Covenant House's saddest legacy is that it misdirected the public's perception of the real circumstances and needs of homeless and runaway young people, thereby contributing to misconceived public policy and spending for this group. Now, with Covenant House in disarray, the specter looms of no safety net to catch these needy young people.

Working at the Times Square center, it was very apparent that the actual population of young people did not begin to match up with Covenant House's portrayal of them. It was surprising how long it took us to register this as a problem, however. A powerful sense of mission carried us along, kept us looking ahead to new centers in new cities, and diverted our attention from the reality around us. But talking with residents and staff about the needs of residents made it clear that Covenant House's services were terribly inadequate. The short-term shelter services the agency provided on a grand scale, housing upwards of two hundred young people a night in its Times Square facility, were indeed valuable. Yet they were so short-term and superficial in nature as to have little real impact on the circumstances of the residents.

A study of the Covenant House program during our years there would have shown a rampant pattern of recidivism—residents, such as Tommy, coming back again and again, hopelessly stuck on the streets without promise of permanent housing or a stable job. It would have revealed a dubious practice of mixing hardened street kids with younger, meeker runaways on the residential floors, and chronic understaffing in the center. Child-care workers often were barely able to establish contact with each resident between crises, much less provide meaningful counseling. To its credit, Covenant House eventually added a longer-term residential and job-training program, Rights of Passage. Yet even in this undertaking once again Covenant House exhibited the same mania for size that seemed to shadow all its work. What had been designed as a highly structured and supervised program for twenty-five young people was transformed into a massive and loosely regulated program for three hundred in one large facility.

The quality of the Covenant House shelter programs was a matter of considerable discussion within the child-care field, even during our years there. For all its growing resources—

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Covenant House's annual budget increased from $11 million in 1981 when we began work there, to $30 million when we left at the end of 1983—the agency displayed little interest in examining the effectiveness of its services. Instead, the agency directed its new income to an ever-widening expansion into new cities. Large short-term shelters similar to the Times Square prototype were planned for Houston, Fort Lauderdale, and Boston.

Usually, Covenant House was invited to a city by wealthy Catholic businessmen or, at times, by the bishop of the diocese, who would pledge significant financial support to the venture. When moving into new cities, Covenant House consistently did two things: one, it refused to modify its programs to the specific needs of local youth, and two, it ignored the efforts of already-existing programs. In fact, Covenant House would describe its expansion as necessitated by the absence of services for young people in that city. Only in Boston was this approach effectively challenged. There, a local agency called Bridge Over Troubled Waters had been providing shelter and counseling to young people for years. Sister Barbara Whelan, C.S.J., the program's director, was incensed by Covenant House's standard claim that no one was doing anything in Boston, and that what was needed was a large crisis center smack in the middle of the city's infamous Combat Zone. Covenant House spent six hundred thousand dollars buying a building there. But Sister Whelan convinced the Boston politicians, the social service community, and the priests' senate, that a series of small centers scattered throughout less ominous sections of the city providing longer-term care was the better answer. Sister Whelan even began appearing at Ritter's speeches to challenge him on his plans. As a result of her questioning, Covenant House, which refused to discuss or modify its approach, sold its building (at a profit) and packed its bags.

Covenant House purchased a good deal of real estate, some of it speculatively. Shortly after we left the agency, we were amazed to learn of the purchase of the Times Square Hotel for $17 million. The hotel was adjacent to the original Covenant House center, where the Covenant House community now lived. As an assemblage, the combined properties, filling the 8th Avenue block front from 43rd to 44th Streets, now had development rights of considerable value. According to Ritter, the real estate was to be the agency's "endowment." Yet the value could only be realized if the properties were vacant, and with over seven hundred rooms, the Times Square Hotel was the city's largest SRO (single room occupancy) hotel, providing modest housing to marginal individuals. At the time, New York City was belatedly implementing a moratorium on the closing of SRO hotels, as the loss of this inexpensive housing had contributed significantly to the growing homeless population. Nearly every not-for-profit agency in the city supported the moratorium as an emergency measure. Cardinal John O'Connor spoke forcefully of the church's support for this legislation.

Covenant House joined forces with the city's real estate development interests in an effort to defeat the bill. When the moratorium was passed nevertheless, Covenant House attempted to evict SRO tenants. When challenged by the Coalition for the Homeless and others, Ritter expressed annoyance. He told the press he was having to subsidize the operation of the hotel since his tenants could afford only limited rents, and he now had a large mortgage to pay. He appealed to the city to send him homeless families with young children to live in Times Square in this decrepit building, as he could then charge the far higher rates collected by other welfare hotel operators. This from the agency whose motto at the time was "Times Square—No Place for a Child."

While the Times Square Hotel story was unfolding, at a time when our regard for the agency had rarely been lower, we attended the ten-year reunion of the Covenant Community in October 1987. Several hundred former volunteers and their spouses returned to New York City for a weekend of socializing and reflection. Quite a few couples, like ourselves, had met while volunteering at Covenant House and living in the community. Almost everyone still worked in social services. For all of us, our experiences at Covenant House had been the catalyst for our life choices. As one friend observed, Father Ritter had played the same role in the 1980s as had John and Robert Kennedy in the 1960s, calling young people to devote their gifts to the service of others and providing the opportunity.

The gathering reminded us of the many exceptional aspects of Covenant House, the extraordinary people we had encountered there, its vitality and excitement, and the fact that for all its shortcomings Covenant House's doors were always open to young people in need. We were struck once again by the paradox of the place, and reminded that for all our anger at the betrayals and abuses we had seen and heard of, we felt a strange loyalty to the elements of good that somehow survived there.

The most serious allegations facing Covenant House are made by four former residents who say Father Ritter engaged them in sexual relationships while they were in his charge. Of all the damaging revelations about the agency, none are as difficult for supporters of Covenant House to accept or believe.

In our years at Covenant House, we did not see or hear of any improper conduct involving Ritter and residents of the center. However, accounts which we know to be credible circulated of inappropriate behavior on his part toward young male staff members. Members of the community brought these accounts to the attention of Ritter and his Conventual Franciscan province in

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1983. We don't know if the Franciscans made any response to this information. We do know that Ritter continued to live alone in an apartment behind his office at the center, rather than in the more traditional and disciplined setting of his Franciscan community residence located just blocks away.

It is well known that adults who sexually abuse children often seek out situations where they will have access to trusting minors. As an agency working with troubled, sexually active young people, Covenant House should have been more alert to this threat, and should have insisted on the most rigorous standards of personal conduct on the part of the staff at all levels. Rumors or accounts of misconduct should have been vigilantly investigated.

Perhaps it is not surprising that Covenant House has begun to unravel. Neither Ritter's Franciscan province nor the agency's board of directors, both with authority over Ritter and his operation of Covenant House, seemed to have scrutinized the program carefully. It has been reported the Franciscans were unaware of Ritter's $98,000 salary. It also has been disclosed that certain board members received personal loans from a trust fund established with the bulk of Ritter's salary for the benefit of the children at Covenant House. In addition, certain senior staff received loans directly from the agency. These transactions, now under investigation by the New York state attorney general, may be technically legal, but they seem a dubious practice for any charitable organization and are sadly symptomatic of the agency's management style. Given Covenant House's association with the Catholic church, it is extraordinary that church officials did not require greater accountability from the organization.

Unfortunately, the potential for abuse was designed into the formal structure of the enterprise. Covenant House was organized independently of the Archdiocese of New York as a membership corporation, with Father Ritter the sole member of the corporation. In effect, Ritter was its owner, with complete discretion in appointing and firing the board members who were supposed to be supervising him in his role as executive director.

Equally destructive was Covenant House's attitude that any action could be rationalized as in the interest of "the kids." Those in charge operated as though the virtue of their mission allowed them to establish their own rules of conduct. From misleading the public and its donors about the identity of most residents, to acquiring multimillion dollar real estate and chasing poor tenants from their rooms, to awarding six-figure salaries to some in management while paying child-care staff subsistence wages, to operating its corporate and financial affairs at the margins of legality, Covenant House was perched on a slippery slope where objective reality had little meaning.

Covenant House is not unique in taking such license. Other charitable groups have fallen victim to the temptation of operating beyond the limits of moral propriety. It would be particularly unfortunate, however, if Covenant House's conduct resulted in diminished regard and support for the many church-affiliated child-care agencies that operate programs of high quality. Ironically, child care is one of the most highly regulated fields in social services. Most church-affiliated agencies rely on government contracts for the majority of their support. These agencies are held accountable by their funding sources through regular program and financial reviews. They are not the problem. But charities such as Covenant House which exist largely independently of government support and its attendant regulations, require far greater public scrutiny. New guidelines and sanctions must be developed for the board members of such charitable organizations. And all of us should be asking better questions in choosing which charities to support.

There is an aspect of the Covenant House story that is quite frightening. The agency and its leaders were dangerously out of touch with their motivations, and the reality that the impulse to do good is always, in some manner, complex. This institutional blindness and lack of self-awareness is at the heart of the whole sad tale.

To some degree, this blindness afflicted all of us at Covenant House. The inability of many ethical, thoughtful people to acknowledge the institution's growing disdain for basic values recalled to us Christ's admonition that those who have eyes will not see, and those who have ears will not hear. In contemplating the loyalty and support shown by many good people to an obviously troubled institution, and the silence that this loyalty commanded, we are reminded of how frail and malleable of conscience we are.

Covenant House also was blind to the dangerous fascination and threat of the seamy subculture that was its context. Like a canvas pressed against a volatile substance, the streets impressed their image on Covenant House. The street culture of casual manipulation, deceit, unchecked self-aggrandizement, and scorn for conventional standards of behavior seeped in.

We hope the agency survives this crisis, and that with new management, careful spending, and a clearly defined mission, Covenant House can emerge as a more effective program. But this also is an opportunity, finally, to begin acknowledging the true needs of the nation's most neglected children. More children now live in poverty in our country than at any time in our nation's history. In an astounding number of families young children and teenagers are being abused. These children and their families require intensive help at the earliest possible moment, before young spirits and bodies are destroyed, and before young people find their way to the streets. It is time that attention and resources are directed at intervention and prevention services. And it is past time for Covenant House to add its forceful voice in acknowledging the effects of unmitigated poverty and child abuse.

Many young people have received valuable services at Covenant House. In the long run, however, the agency's real contributions to improving the lives of young people have been limited from the start. Ultimately, the assistance programs that make the most enduring contributions are those that challenge the status quo. And without negating the value of the attention that Covenant House has provided to "street kids" for twenty years, we believe that as a society, we are properly inclined to demand more. We should be eager to master common enemies: ignorance, disease, despair. We should, therefore, be wary of institutions which skate on the surface of problems and which fail to challenge the conditions creating homelessness and runaway behavior in young people, while distracting us with lurid descriptions of the symptoms. □

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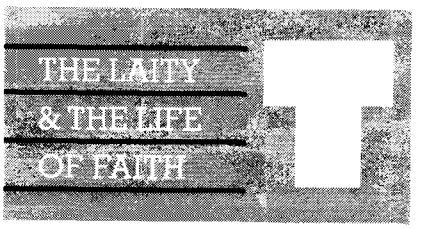
AN HONEST DAY'S WORK

GETTING REJECTED ISN'T ALL BAD

PAUL WILKES



The Notre Dame Sisters at St. Benedict's grade school and the Marianists at Cathedral Latin High in Cleveland, then the Jesuits at Marquette did their work well. Throughout my seventeen years of Catholic education, the message came through loud, and clear, and frequently: the object in life is not to make the most money, be the most famous or powerful, but somehow to do good and make this world a better place. "What shall it profit a man if he...." Protestants are much better at remembering and quoting Scripture, but that one is burned into my brain.

I'm not that sure that the millions of words that I have committed to paper or the documentaries I have made or the classes I have taught have changed anyone or indeed made this a better time and place, but I haven't forgotten what was drummed into me in my more formative years. I've tried to make the work of my mind, hands, and mouth creditable, and in no small measure out of the trepidation that someday I would run into one of my Catholic school teachers and be asked to give an accounting of myself.

In the twenty-five years I've pursued my work, I've found that I need constant reminders, frequent midcourse corrections (if I might use some space jargon) to keep me—if not on the right path—at least in sight of it. I need this help because I am weak and venal and, if given a chance, would probably go astray. I am not made of strong stuff. To keep a vision before me I need a lot of help.

I have tried to take other paths, believe me. When I was the host for a PBS television series, I got a call from a talent agency and actually sat in a sumptuous New York office, drinking a Perrier while a well-known agent called Detroit to tell them to watch "the voice of the new credibility" that night. The Ford Motor Company, the agent said in a low and reverent voice, might be the lucky car maker to have Paul Wilkes draped over the hood of its new models. If you want those new commercials to sell some cars, here is the man who can do the job for you, continued the agent. We're talking unassailable, irresistible honesty.

A year later, I watched a videotape of a morning talk show for which I was a summer replacement as host and saw a glib, supercilious, shallow but uncomfortably enticing me. Had I listened to the voices then that said I had a bright future in that kind of television, I have the feeling that today I might be a wealthier and better known man, but I don't think a happier one.

I have written silly book proposals and screenplays that, thank God, never garnered much interest. I can't take credit for those midcourse corrections—I've just been rejected a lot. And with those rejections, I was inevitably steered back to projects that turned out to be somewhat more worthwhile—a profile of a parish priest, a film on Thomas Merton, a novel about a man's spiritual search, a book of essays on people I consider inspirational, a business school's ethics course.

Not that everything I've worked on has been infused with meaning or worth—my clips reveal many stories about the fleeting and the inane (from movie starlets to basketball players to corporate wars). But, for the most part, I don't have to be ashamed of the vast majority. The quality others will have to judge, but at least the subjects don't make me cringe.

While I do make a great effort to choose good subjects—and to carry out that mandate to make this world a better place by virtue of the information I will impart—my work day is strangely devoid of any feeling of transcendence or a sense that I am actually doing any good at all.

The making of the PBS documentary on Thomas Merton was filled with too many days when I felt like a huckster in a pinched-back suit and an ingratiating smile as I begged, wheedled, and cajoled potential sponsors for the hundreds of thousands of dollars such an undertaking requires. The interviews with those who knew Merton best were surely fascinating and a rare opportunity. But getting to the Dalai Lama in Dharmsala required months of frustrating dealings with the government of India—one of the world's most highly developed bureaucracies—a brutal sixteen-hour van ride over poor roads, and the guarantee of weeks of dysentery. Yes, I can still remember the Dalai Lama's wonderful laugh and clear-eyed look, but those dozens of tiny pills for dysentery, and night terrors about road dust in our camera are equally vivid.

My months with Father Joseph Greer, whom I profiled for the *New Yorker* magazine, register as a period of confusion, of not knowing how the piece would go, what I would put in, or if the story line would hold. For most of those days, I was acutely aware that I was probably wasting time, that my questions were blunt instruments with which I was flogging him and not fluttering wings on which he could soar. As I sat with his doctors discussing his bone marrow cancer, I felt dull and stupid, unable to understand the medical procedures to which he was being subjected.

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In 1987, Commonweal published a series of articles by lay people who described their personal experience of faith in the work place. We received such positive response to the series that we have decided to continue it. We asked each individual: How is your Catholic faith manifest in your daily life and work? How has faith shaped your choices: vocational, financial, ethical; and vice versa? Where do you find spiritual strength and guidance?

Our sixth installment in the series is by Paul Wilkes, author of the forthcoming *In Mysterious Ways: The Death and Life of a Parish Priest* (Random House). He is currently visiting writer at Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts.

At the computer, as I try to make my notes, research, and thoughts into some cohesive form, transcendence or any feeling of well-being is even further away. Does this description work? I've said that before and better. What's wrong? Why can't I get this right? Why do I know so little about history? Why can't I put these pieces together with some felicity—it's all there on paper. My word processing program works fine, but my mental processing is so primitive.

And yet, at day's end, either in the field or before my computer screen, while I rarely have a sense of well-being or confidence in what I am doing, I usually have the simple, primitive feeling of finishing an honest day's work. I often think of my father, once a coal miner, who, when the whistle blew went down the shaft and when it sounded again, came up. Tired, dirty, but somehow honorable for the tons of anthracite he had loaded.

I, on the other hand, may have worked in vain and nothing of that day's efforts will ever appear or be of use (coal, on the other hand, never had to pass an editor's muster), but because I felt the subject itself was worthwhile, my work was not a waste. The project is right, the person, place, occurrence, or social movement I am addressing has inherent merit and should be told about.

Oddly enough, although I am always working to produce an end product, I rarely think about that. How will it look on the screen or page? What reaction will it produce? Those worries are too far away. Besides, I will not be in the room when it happens. To the reader or viewer, I am irrelevant. They do not want to know of me, they want to know of my subject, and only when I prove to be an inadequate conduit between subject and audience am I noticed. Am I conscious of my work transforming their reality? Hardly.

While my subjects are often religious and frequently Catholic, I don't have a sense of being a "Catholic writer and film maker." I am not that "Catholic in the world" we learned about in grade and high school, some sort of guerrilla fighter who constantly was infiltrating the minds and hearts of Jews, Protestants, and other unfortunate heathens to bring them the True Faith. While I know I am a Catholic, in a sense that is put aside. I am, in various ways and on various days, everything from an artist to a technician to a salesman. I just want to be the best craftsman I can in whatever tasks I perform that day.

Guidance for my life's work during the past twenty-five years—when it comes in some form other then a rejection slip—comes from a very conventional Catholic source. Daily Mass.

When I am on a college campus, I find the chapel; at home, I rise early and first tend to my bad back in a swimming pool and then to my frail soul with the 7:05 Mass with the Trappists at St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts.

I have never been a big fan of experimental liturgies and folk Masses, and while good preaching is a bonus, I prefer the quiet and solitude of weekday Mass. The Trappists are especially wonderful: they pause after readings and unhurriedly say the prayers so that a person can join in without that breathless, impatient pace that seems endemic to many Sunday Masses.

At Mass, the words of Scripture never fail to educate and direct me, giving me moment to pause and reflect about my life and my work. Am I the boastful guy at the front of the temple telling God how lucky he is to have me present or that fellow in back who can't get his eyes or ego off the floor? The profligate son or his jealous brother? The worker hired at the beginning of the day or the end? The boss in the vineyard? Where are my seeds being sown?

The groans and wails of the Psalms resonate within me. God is far away. Why do my enemies seem to have the upper hand? Why do the folks who seem to be living amoral lives seem to be so bloody happy and prosperous? I sit in a church. The Israelites roamed the desert. Our basic concerns are no different.

And, within the Mass, there are a couple of moments for me that always have special meaning. One is a line from the Our Father which I'm sure was written especially for the free-lance writers of the world. "Give us this day our daily bread." When money is not coming in and is not even a prospect and I am keeping our anemic checkbook balance a secret from my wife, it is a moment for ardent prayer. I am genuinely worried. And, I want God to help. I am indeed asking him for my daily bread—as well as a mortgage payment, car insurance, new roof, kids' clothes, and something to put on that bread.

There is also a moment of forgiveness for me at Mass: the words before Communion, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word, and I shall be healed." I like that, a single word is all that is needed. And, with that unspoken but felt word, I can go on. I am healed, forgiven—ready to start afresh; my past omissions, commissions, and general stupidities are now history.

And with Communion, I am confronted with the awesome reality that the God who made the sand, the dinosaurs, apples, my family, and me is about to enter my body. The most important, most powerful, most loving Being ever comes to me in that tiny piece of unleavened bread.

The moments after Communion are calm. I sit with my friend. I am ready to live that day and do my work. □

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ROCKIN' & ROLLIN'

'CRY-BABY' & 'MYSTERY TRAIN'

In *Soul on Ice* (McGraw-Hill, 1968) Eldridge Cleaver identified the 1954 *Brown* v. *Board of Education* desegregation decision as the pivotal event in America's racial, spiritual, and sexual "convalescence." Forbidden access to the full life of the mind, African-Americans had cultivated the wisdom and perceptions of the body. In turning away from black America, whites had repressed their own sensuality. Desegregation would "graft Mind back onto Body," Cleaver wrote. If black Americans were finally going to have access to libraries, "the deep frozen geeks of the Hot Dog and Malted Milk set" would be exposed to the genius of black America. Black music was the subversive element. First, Chubby Checker and his Twist taught whites "how to shake their asses again." Then, thanks to Elvis Presley and the Beatles, the soulful power of black rhythm and blues was transformed into rock 'n' roll. "The Twist was a guided missile, launched from the ghetto into the very heart of suburbia," Cleaver claimed. "A new awareness and enjoyment of the flesh" was humanizing an increasingly technological and mechanical society.

One doubts Cleaver still clings to this bold metaphysical theory now that he is an evangelical preacher. But much of its energetic dualism reverberates (literally) in director and writer John Waters's *Cry-Baby*. Like Cleaver, Waters (*Hairspray*) locates his rock 'n' roll fable in 1954, and he is equally explicit about the connection between race and class and music and sex. Cry-Baby Walker (Johnny Depp), the swivel-hipped teenage hero of this mock musical, titillates his audience by promising "Something hillbilly; something colored." Obviously, Waters thinks such dichotomies are still relevant.

Much of *Cry-Baby* plays like a lurid and absurd dream: leering, grotesque, and seemingly deformed bodies; a backseat birth; mock judicial proceedings; squirming through sewers; threatening and forever heckling parents; the eery appearance of Patty Hearst (as an actress). Waters, the idiosyncratic creator of the scatological *Pink Flamingos*, has a readily recognizable, if not unique, sensibility. *Cry-Baby* is done in the broadest satirical style imaginable, yet it invokes the icons of teen-age life with a kind of sincerity. This can be amusing, but the movie is more like an echo chamber than a natural landscape. Waters is obsessed with the artificial, often bloodless nature of modern life, and rightly so. But he offers little in its stead beyond a parallel indulgence in outrageousness. He's a consumer.

As a musical, *Cry-Baby* is a kind of pimply, hyper-thyroid version of *Grease*. Rock 'n' roll aspirant Cry-Baby is a misunderstood juvenile delinquent from the wrong side of the tracks. He's the leader of a troupe of teenage mutant rock 'n' rollers called the "Drapes," who also double as backup musicians in his band. Cry-Baby represents forbidden pleasures for the delectably prim and bobby-soxed Allison Vernon-Williams (Amy Locane). "Oh," she sighs, watching Cry-Baby and friends loiter in the high school parking lot, "I'm so tired of being good."

Depp is a physical clone of James Dean, and a musical shadow of Elvis Presley. He's pretty, and plausibly earnest. Locane, although she plays the pure and inhibited maiden, has some of Grace Kelly's daunting sensuality. It's a match made in jukebox heaven.

Waters skewers the sexual pieties and social conventions of the archetypal American TV family. The Vaselined leader of the high school's "squares" is a veritable incarnation of Cleaver's Hot Dog and Malted Milk set. "We'll get married and live in suburbia," he woos Allison. The two attend the RSVP Charm School, run by a dithering Polly Bergen. "Beauty, Brains, Breeding, Bounty" is the school's credo. Cry-Baby and his gang are untouchables who carry the virus of sexuality and rebellion.

In bringing Cry-Baby and Allison together, Waters dramatizes the prurient fantasies of a buttoned-up age. But so little remains of the 1950s Malted Milk set that the movie seems to be using a sledgehammer on a gnat. Waters might be accused of being the last person in America who takes this stuff seriously enough to lampoon it.

Director and writer Jim Jarmusch's *Mystery Train* is a much more portentous exercise, but it too regards rock 'n' roll as a crucial expression of contemporary culture. If Waters wields his camera like a can of spray paint, Jarmusch (*Down by Law*) is an ascetical Pointillist. There's a painterly look to *Mystery Train*. It has a spare, if not static, minimalist perspective. The camera holds shots in provocative but ultimately didactic ways. Indeed, Jarmusch repeatedly returns to the same shot or sequence of shots. Naturally, a certain suspense accrues. When no revelation is forthcoming, however, tedium descends. In other words, you'll have no trouble locating the train in this movie but the mystery will prove a good deal more arcane.

However, for those with a certain kind of patience, *Mystery*

John Fandel

Someone Says So

A rift becomes Grand Canyon, given time—
Ten zillion years, give or take a day.
Gulley to gulch takes less almost to rime.

And so "the little rift within the lute"
Will change the music in 3/4 that time
To jig the dying polka of a day.

Better, then, kiss and make up; heart goes gray
Before the bitter thorn bears better fruit.

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Train has quirky rewards. It offers some startling, well-marinated moments: a woman harrowingly stalked down an otherwise deserted street; a bout of lovemaking in which the persistent camera angle exerts its own voyeuristic presence; a predictable insult that results in shocking violence. And then there is the droll sense of absurdity pervading the movie.

Laid out across the stern visual structure of this film, the skin of the story is thin. We get three parallel stories about the lives of nine characters. In fleeting and unknowing ways, each touches on the others. First, and most incongruously, we meet a teenage Japanese couple (Masatoshi Nagasi and Youki Kudoh) on a pilgrimage to Graceland, Elvis Presley's house cum shrine. Next, an Italian widow (Nicholetta Braschi), improbably stuck in Memphis, ends up in an adjacent room at the same dilapidated Memphis hotel as the teenagers. Last, a trio of sodden misfits on the run from the police also checks in.

Jarmusch lethargically circles around a few iconic settings, giving his actors bits of funny business to hold our flagging interest. At the axis of these unconnecting stories are the hotel clerk and bellhop. *Mystery Train* has great luck here. The black blues singer Screamin' Jay Hawkins plays the desk clerk. Hawkins has the massive, implacable head of a Mayan god, and wears the most brilliant scarlet suit this side of Rome. His sly wit and evident sense of mischief break the confining frame of this picture. Hawkins studies every calamity with the same ageless disinterest, and his withering remarks are like unorthodox opinions at a modernist garden party. Whenever *Mystery Train* pauses at the hotel's desk, it gets very funny, and that includes the rat-sized plastic cockroach prominently on display.

Jarmusch also has luck with Ms. Braschi, whose Italian forbearance is put to the test by the presence of a voluble idiot for a roommate and the appearance of an ectoplasmic Elvis Presley. "I must have gotten the wrong address," Elvis's ghost intones mellifluously before fading away. And that might serve as an epigraph for this instruction in dissociation. The film's last lingering shot pictures a train, a pickup truck, and a police car all breaking off in opposite directions, and presumably taking their occupants on to the next cosmic misunderstanding. One thing is for certain: wherever they go, Time will hang heavy on their hands.

PAUL BAUMANN

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MEDIA

OUR TOWN

LYNCH'S 'TWIN PEAKS'

For years now readers of Graham Greene have been referring to the fascinating, seedy, morally ambiguous landscape of his novels as "Greeneland." Now, with the advent of "Twin Peaks"—the David Lynch miniseries for ABC—I think we can start referring with equal admiration to the visionary realm of "Lynchburg."

"Twin Peaks" may not be the very best thing ever done on TV; though every time I rescreen my tapes I am convinced it is. But it certainly is one of the most stunningly intelligent productions in long memory: a validation of Lynch's enormous talent and a validation of how very good TV—and I mean *real* TV, not PBS rehashings of Arthur Miller plays—can be. ABC has taken what network folks call a "gamble" on the series. But the gamble has already paid off, at least if anybody at ABC cares about a place in history.

"Lynchburg" as incarnated in "Twin Peaks" shares the same ambiance as Lynch's films, *Eraserhead*, *The Elephant Man*, *Dune*, and *Blue Velvet*. It is a world remarkably, almost boringly like our own—same people, same machinery, same constant background noise (the "Lynch noise," to *aficionados*)—except that it is open to the possibility of the monstrous. A baby is born out of wedlock and looks like a cross between an early fetus and a salamander (*Eraserhead*). A severed human ear is discovered in the grass in an ordinary town on an ordinary afternoon (*Blue Velvet*). And how do Lynchburg people react to these eruptions of the unnamable into the quotidian? The way you and I react to the monstrous that does, in fact, intrude upon our lives every day: with wonder, fear, and, above all, our indomitable habit of behaving "normally" even when the world around us—a world, say, where mass killers get gigs on TV talk shows—has gone to hell. It's amusing that Lynch's first film, *Eraserhead*, was reviewed and for a while classed as a horror film. "Horror" distances the other, tells us that it can be exorcised. Lynch will

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have none of this: he is the lyric poet of shock—in the clinical sense of our numbness in the face of the uncanny, and especially the uncanny inside *us*.

In "Twin Peaks," the northern town that gives its name to the series, Laura Palmer, the most beloved girl in her senior high school class, is found naked, raped, and murdered, on the beach of the local lake. The sheriff—whose name is Harry S. Truman—discovers that the rape/murder was committed across the state line, so an F.B.I. special investigator, Dale Cooper, is also summoned to the scene.

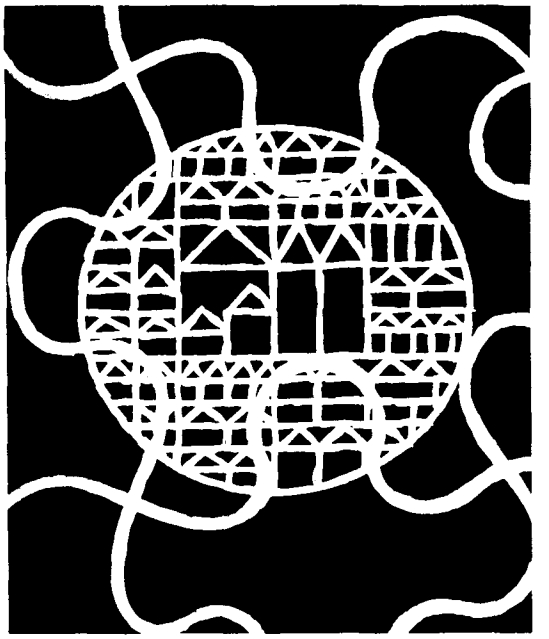
And that—no kidding—is as much of the story as I can tell you, without using flow-charts or enough words to fill a short story (and note that I'm writing this not yet midway through the series). The plot—involving teen bullies, bikers, drug traffic, adulteries right and left, crazed psychiatrists, and—I'm serious here—potential Norwegian investors in Twin Peaks property—is as byzantine and convoluted as any of the great *films noirs* of the 1940s, or as those of the literary father of the *film noir*, Raymond Chandler. Inside rumors are that, by the end of the series, we still will not know who killed Laura Palmer. It makes no difference, and, in fact, I for one hope we don't.

Because "Twin Peaks," in the splendid tradition of the American detective film, insists that guilt is everywhere and nowhere at once, and that the role of the investigator—Agent Cooper, in this case—is to discover and to act out for us what Kafka wrote in hope and despair: that "Guilt is never to be doubted."

Agent Cooper—played with what can only be called genius by Kyle MacLachlan—is almost painfully one of us, and maybe one of the truly original inventions in the history of the detective story. He is vain, penny-pinching, and even silly: he talks constantly into his pocket recorder to his secretary, "Diane," and he obsesses about the cherry pie he had on his drive to Twin Peaks. He is also brilliant: he almost instantly connects Laura's murder to a similar murder that had occurred a year ago in another part of the state, and he enlarges a videotape of Laura's eyes to see in their reflection the motorbike of her secret boyfriend. And then again, he can go into ecstasy over a cup of good coffee or over being told that the rabbit he has seen is a snowshoe rabbit. He is, in other words, a kind of holy fool. And this holy fool's investigation of the murder—murders?—at Twin Peaks, simultaneously canny and naive, is the real story of the series just as, say, Philip Marlowe's investigation of the originating crime is the real story of any of Chandler's novels.

But there's more. It's not just that "Twin Peaks" is a marvelous TV event because it's done by a "serious," "film" director. To say that would be to reaffirm the embedded cultural prejudice of this decade, that "film" is serious art and TV is garbage art. (It was otherwise thirty years ago: film had the garbage detail then, according to the critics.) In fact, "Twin Peaks" is *better* than Lynch's theatrical releases, great though they are, and it is better, I think, because TV is itself the perfect medium for the special kind of shock, the precise moral shiver, that is his predestined subject.

You go to the movie theater. TV comes to you. It's as simple as that. The uncanny—JFK's assassination, chemical weapons in Iraq—*does* come into your den as you eat your cherry pie,



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and you do swallow both those things at once. And—wonder of wonders—you go on with your life. And how? Because shock—in the sense I have described that state as Lynch's special province—has, for inhabitants of the late American twentieth century, become a more or less permanent survival mechanism.

In one brilliant scene in the first episode, Cooper and Truman walk into a room in a bank to examine Laura's safety-deposit box. A deer's head is lying on the conference table. "Oh," says the bank lady as they stare at it. "It fell off the wall." No one says anything else about the deer's head as the scene unfolds.

Of course. This is a world in which everything is connected, from accidents to conspiracies, and therefore a world to which the only appropriate response is the stoic glance that neither believes nor disbelieves, but simply takes things, from corpses to cherry pie, as they are.

"Twin Peaks" is not just a great TV series. It is a great series *about* TV: not just a rebirth of *film noir* but also "Dallas" or "Falcon Crest" as they might have been written by Faulkner, Chandler, or Jim Thompson. It is the bravest glance I know into the moral vacuity of our public life *and* into the dead panic we feel in the face of that vacuity.

Lynchburg, in other words, is nearly everywhere. In the 1990s, it's *Our Town*.

FRANK McCONNELL

BOOKS

Ann Beattie: less than minimal

PICTURING WILL
Ann Beattie
Random House, $18.95, 221 pp.

Rand Richards Cooper

Last November, *Harper's Magazine* published a lengthy essay by Tom Wolfe, "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast," in the which the New Journalist-cum-Newer Novelist lamented the state of contemporary American fiction. One aesthetic mistake singled out for special dismay was the movement often called minimalism—those "K-Mart Realists," as Wolfe put it, who write about "lonely Rustic Septic Tank Rural settings, in a deadpan prose ... with the emotions anesthetized, given a shot of novocaine."

The problem with "movements" of writing, of course, is knowing just who belongs. Who *are* these much-celebrated, much-maligned minimalists? One would surely point to the late Raymond Carver. What about the Barthelme brothers—do they belong? What about Tobias Wolff? Joy Williams reads like one—sometimes. Peter Cameron most of the time. Tom Wolfe says that Robert Coover is one. Can we take his word for it?

One way out of this is to look past the sociology of K-Marts and rural settings, into the lives of words and sentences. When Ann Beattie, whose new novel, *Picturing Will*, has recently been published by Random House, burst onto the scene in 1976, one felt oneself in the presence of a writer who used language in a new way. Her first novel, *Chilly Scenes of Winter* (1976), read like a minimalist manifesto, and established her as one of the movement's Founding Mothers. Ironic, exceedingly simple in plot and diction, the novel joined a Hemingwayesque syntax to a hip, me-decade vision of pop culture. The effect was like reading "Big Two-Hearted River" rewritten as a script for, say, Robert Altman. Above all, the novel's manner was beguilingly plain. (A German friend has commented that it's a perfect book for students learning English as a second language.) Here is a good example of minimalist sentences in action on a random page of *Chilly Scenes*:

"She's very nice, Charles thinks. Why couldn't you like her? He looks down at the piece of paper again and makes a notation on the pad. He has the eerie feeling that when he looks up Laura and Jim and Rebecca will be there. He throws his pen down. He gets up and picks up the pen, goes back to the desk and sits down. Lobster Newburg. That must have been delicious. That cheeseburger was awful."

Seven books and almost fifteen years later, Ms. Beattie still presents an array of standard minimalist props. Her pages are laden with brand names. Popular tunes float in the background. The TV is always on. And yet the sentences are radically different:

"... Without knowing much about him, without even knowing, until they applied for a marriage license, that he had been married before, without ever pausing to consider how strange it was that he had no friends and that his own brother was mystified that he had been asked to attend the wedding, without any knowledge beyond what she saw in his eyes and what she felt when she touched his body—she was willing to leave behind worried friends, argue with and finally stop speaking to her parents, and view her own ambition with skepticism."

Chilly Scenes of Winter took up the lives of young people just out of school, unattached and on the move. Its sentences—even its pages, so full of white space—suggested the atomistic nature of its characters and their lives. *Picturing Will*, on the other hand, is a meditation upon that most mysterious and profound of all human attachments—that of parent to child. Its language complicates itself accordingly.

The novel sets forth a network of relationships centering on a young boy named Will. Jody, Will's mother, lives with him

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in Virginia; she's a wedding photographer who keeps wishing she could be marrying the men whose weddings she photographs. Mel, Jody's New York boyfriend, wants her to marry him, bring Will to the city, and take up a life as a real photographer—that is, as an artist. Wayne, Jody's first husband and Will's father, is a philanderer who is living with his current (and third) wife, Corky, in Florida, where his job as a delivery man provides ample opportunity to pursue his favorite hobby.

The narrative is constructed in part of short, italicized reflections on parenting. "*You have created the child, but you could not have anticipated the child's power. Because the child's presence and desires are so constant, it becomes the course of least possible pain to persuade yourself that being subsumed is synonymous with parenthood.*" These portentous observations form a kind of text of which the story itself seems to have been intended as an illustration. But that story, unfortunately, is both fragmentary and tedious. Its events are desultory in the extreme. Mel arranges a show for Jody in a New York gallery. It succeeds, and Jody launches a new career. Will plays with his best friend, Wagoner. He takes a trip to Florida to see his father. Wayne has a torrid affair with a woman who turns out to be involved in cocaine deals. He gets arrested. Patsy Cline sings "You Belong to Me" as they take Will's father away. Will goes back to New York; Jody marries Mel. The novel ends.

Picturing Will is a novel of pointless, annoying digressions. Why, for instance, do we need to know, following a recollection of Jody's first, chance encounter with Wayne—she was passing him on a crowded street when the heel of one of her shoes snapped off—that "the thin little leather heel she held was the shed tail of a captured lizard"? (Is this a "foreshadowing" of the boy's fascination with dinosaurs, hundreds of pages later?) Why, in an overheard conversation between two anonymous women in a park, are we given to learn that the former surgeon general, C. Everett Koop, used to roam his neighborhood as a child with his mother, looking for stray cats he could capture and bring home to operate on?

These things pile up. Again and again, minor characters—a cop, a waitress—wander into the edge of the action where, instead of performing their function and quietly disappearing, they seize the narrative by force, and we find ourselves wrenched from an important conversation between Jody and a gallery owner, and set down in a long passage about their waitress's strange dreams, her acting class, her psychoanalyst. Why? Well, why not?

The digressive mode weakens the larger elements of the novel as well. Inquiring into every conceivable "story," leaping about among multiple points of view, burdening characters with their pasts as if with several layers of clothing, the narrative has trouble performing the simplest motions. There is a nightmarish quality to *Picturing Will*; story opens into story opens into story, and we forget where we started. In a certain sense, *Picturing Will* is the ultimate democratic narrative—it continually hands the microphone over to the audience; it lets every person's story be told. One longs for a touch of the novelist's benign authoritarianism. What has been minimized here is not prose but architecture; not the novel's emotions, but its form.

Buried in all the mess is a sometimes pained, sometimes rapturous account of the state of being a parent. Consoling her son after a nightmare, Jody knows the strength to be found in another's need: held in her arms, Will becomes "her buffer against the world." Part of the importance of photography to Jody is its simple promise to freeze the child in time; to keep him forever young, protected, and thus protecting. Beattie understands and evokes the significance, to an observing parent, of something as small as a child's tripping over a light cord and then figuring out what has happened. "He reaches down and puts the plug into the socket again, and as he does that, you look at his quick concentration and know that you have lost him for all time." It is a virtue of *Picturing Will* to understand that a child can be lost to something as undramatic as competence.

Ultimately, however, such small revelations get lost in a flood of sentimental longing. Curiously, the object of everyone's affection, the actual Will, is not persuasively present in the novel. He is *seen*; we know a lot about him (he likes won ton soup and GI Joes, makes ash trays in pottery, etc.); but we don't know much about him from the inside. In the mosaic of perspectives the novel attempts to paint, his is the least vividly done. And yet all the other characters are set into action by their relation to him. The effect for a reader is weird. It's like watching people watch a show we can't ourselves see. What's everybody sighing and cheering about? □

PUGNACITY & VISION

THE CATHOLIC MYTH
The Behavior and Beliefs of American Catholics
Andrew M. Greeley
Macmillan, $21.95, 309 pp.

Don Wycliff

Andrew Greeley's ostensible purpose in *The Catholic Myth* is to tell the "fascinating, wonderful, and slightly daffy story of American Catholicism since the end of the Second Vatican Council." He hopes thereby to demonstrate that the "Catholicism in crisis" paradigm that informs most discussion of the church in the popular media is wrong, that "while as an institution the Catholic church is in terrible condition, the Catholic community prospers—precisely because Catholics like being Catholic."

But Greeley has a second agenda as well, and he confesses it right at the start. "I will not try," he says, "to hide my anger at the hierarchy, the clergy, and the scholarship of the American Catholic church. No one can engage in three decades of serious study of American Catholicism and not be angry. Anger is part of the story, too," writes

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Greeley, "an essential part."

In fact, it becomes too much of the story. Greeley's anger—at the hierarchy and the clergy, to be sure, but also at the "leadership elites" in academia and the news media (including my employer), at the "Harvard elite and those like them who run the national Democratic party," at "Catholic self-haters of the *Commonweal* variety," and at countless others—is expressed endlessly, and often viciously, throughout the book. It finally becomes tedious and suggestive almost of obsession. That's sad, because much of Greeley's substantive argument is attractive and important and ought not to be distracted from with such silliness.

His central argument is that "Catholics differ from other Americans in that their imaginations tend to be more 'sacramental,'" meaning that they are "more likely to imagine God as present in the world and the world as revelatory instead of bleak."

Gerard Manley Hopkins had the same thing in mind when he wrote: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God." But Greeley teases this poetic insight out to 309 pages and even develops it into a theory to explain a number of phenomena uncovered in his sociological investigations of American Catholicism.

The most important of those phenomena is the continued loyalty of Catholics to their church, even as—Greeley says—they scorn its leadership and ignore its ukases, particularly that against artificial birth control in *Humanae vitae*.

In Greeley's view, this puzzle is explained by the "sacramental imagination." Catholics like the warm, loving, motherly symbolism it entails, as well as its communitarian implications. By contrast, the "dialectical imagination" that characterizes Protestantism is colder, distant, individualistic—because it sees God as absent from the world.

It's the sacramental imagination that makes Catholics Catholic and keeps them in the church. In Greeley's view, it covers a multitude of sins by blundering or venal incompetents, from bishops and cardinals to Harvard-educated Democratic party bigwigs (he would say bigots) who persist in neglecting the Catholic vote in presidential elections.

Experts in polling and statistics may find grounds to challenge Greeley's scholarly data. In typically pugnacious fashion, he dares them to do so. But any Catholic layperson can relate to some of his findings, like the importance to the laity of good preaching and the dearth of it in the church, or the seeming loss of identity and direction of so many priests.

On one important point, however, I do possess a certain expertise. Writing of the American political, media, and other elites and their treatment of Catholicism, Greeley asks in a footnote: "Is the *New York Times* newspaper...anti-Catholic?" His question was inspired by the paper's failure in 1988 to explore poll data that suggested a non-stereotypical liberalism among Catholics. Others have asked the same question apropos of a more grave matter: The *Times*'s editorial stance on abortion and the church's opposition to it.

It's not for me to convict or acquit the *Times* of such a charge. But Greeley is close to being right when he says that there is an "elite notion that it is somehow reactionary for religious affiliation to influence politics." He'd have been closer if he had said religious conviction instead of affiliation.

It happens that, at this moment in American history, Catholics are the principal exponents of the opposite and, in my view, correct notion that religious conviction must seek to influence politics. And it is the hierarchy, for whom Greeley has such scorn, who are leading in that effort and taking flak for it. □

WHERE SIN ABOUNDS

THE POLITICAL MEANING OF CHRISTIANITY
Glenn Tinder
Louisiana State University Press, $29.95, 243 pp.

Richard Wightman Fox

Glenn Tinder calls his book a "personal statement," and for me it was a disturbing document. He provides a warning to that effect. Catholics and liberal Protestants, he tells us, will find his "Reformation" focus on "fallenness" unpalatable. I did find it jarring to be told, for example, that "power is intrinsically evil," or that the Aristotelian notion of friendship is "basically selfish." But Tinder's book is also distressingly "personal" in the sense that he doesn't care much about contextualizing himself, tracing the sources of his ideas, or debating alternative voices. He is an avowed Augustinian in the tradition of Paul, Luther, and Barth. He also loves Bonhoeffer and Dostoevsky, and draws heavily on Niebuhr. Yet he might have been much more *inter*personal, engaging previous and current thinkers in the conversation that he wishes to spark.

Tinder does generously concede that his viewpoint is just one possible Christian view of human nature and destiny. Catholics and liberal Protestants are not *wrong* to highlight the potential for good in human striving, or to struggle in the world of power and compromise for a just society. But his stress on sinfulness seems to him "to follow more closely the directional signs inherent in the life of one who said that the fullest love was giving up your life for your friends and who died at the hands of men of power."

Insisting repeatedly that "humanity, in Christian terms, is a fallen race" will certainly not gain Tinder a following among liberal Protestants and Catholics. But what I found most disconcerting was neither the accent on sin nor his decision on the whole to go it alone rather than place himself in a community of fellow thinkers. It was that Tinder is so good in some places and so bad in others, rather like Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind.*

Like Bloom, Tinder can be awful, especially in his belly-aching about the modern world and its malefactors of relativism: "We live in a time of profound confusion. Disagreement and doubt are pervasive in almost all nations. Few societies or individuals enjoy untroubled certitude, and

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judging from the disorder of the world, few societies or individuals are in touch with the truth." After encountering such vague and vapid ruminations on page four, it was a struggle to keep reading.

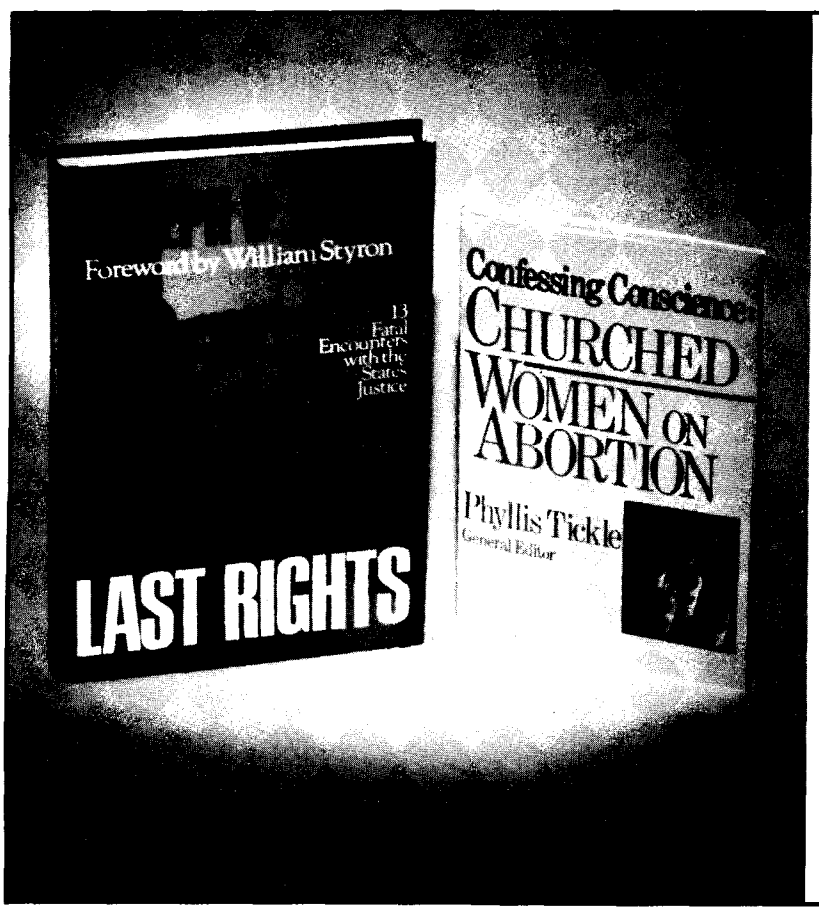
I was glad I did. I did have to endure yet another assault on poor Friedrich Nietzsche, who was Bloom's designated outside agitator. Nietzsche, in Tinder's view, was concerned to "wipe out the idea that every human being deserves respect." That is a very misleading characterization of a thinker who argued that Christianity itself, following the Hebraic tradition, had failed to respect human excellence when it endorsed what Nietzsche termed a "slave morality." Nietzsche faulted Christianity for precisely the reason that Tinder faults Nietzsche.

I also had to disregard formulaic put-downs of "the monstrous bureaucratic despotism prevailing today in the Soviet Union"—a rather unnuanced assertion for a book published in 1989—and of student radicalism in the 1960s and liberation theology since that time. But Tinder's prejudices are pronounced so baldly and unself-consciously that one gets used to them, as one comes to expect the crabby musings of an endearing relative. One learns that there is real wheat to be sifted from the chaff.

At its best the book makes a cogent restatement of Niebuhrian principles—not just Reinhold's but H. Richard's too. From Reinhold, Tinder takes his fundamental structure. Human society can never become a fellowship. At best it can aspire to being a balance of power, and Christians can never be fully defined by their participation in society. They must engage themselves in the world, but they must always keep their distance from it. The Christian self is bifurcated, never at home. But if Christians must resist the liberal temptation to equate the Kingdom with a perfected society, they must also reject the mystical temptation to leave history behind altogether. God is not found by escaping the day-to-day realm. That is where human beings struggle to realize God's will and where they encounter the divine judgment upon their self-aggrandizing pretensions (Reinhold); that is where God, when it suits him, comes after them to bestow the grace they do not merit (H. Richard).

Human beings are paradoxical, both sinners and creatures with a divine likeness. For Reinhold Niebuhr, who always retained his liberal faith that human society could move toward greater justice and community, *imago dei* meant that people had indeterminate capacities for good as well as evil. Tinder follows H. Richard Niebuhr in stressing sin rather than the capacity for good, "the grace of doing nothing" (in H. Richard's phrase) rather than the hope that human action could build a better world. The virtuous actor in history is not the Christian, but God himself. There are indeterminate possibilities for good in human history, Tinder grants, but not because of human capacities. It is because, he writes, "human limits do not imply divine limits. How far God intends, within history, to change human nature and the human situation Christian principles do not permit us to infer."

The idea that God might "change human nature" whenever he pleases sets Tinder off firmly from the liberal Protestant and



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Catholic worldviews. It even goes beyond H. Richard Niebuhr's antiliberal standpoint, according to which God truly acts in history to enact his own will, but does so in spite of the always poor human material he has to work with. Tinder's view is (early) Barthian in its resistance to any limitation that the human mind might impose upon God's freedom of action. If God wants to revise his handiwork, that is his privilege.

What is oddly refreshing about Tinder's perspective is that it protects him against falling into the grateful arms of conservatives just because he has rejected liberalism. "The consciousness of human fallibility is much keener in Christians than in conservatives," he writes, "for they are skeptical of human works and arrangements that typically command deep respect among conservatives. Thus, Christians do not assume that the antiquity of institutions provides any assurances of their justice or efficacy....Long-standing customs and traditions embody not only the wisdom of generations but also their iniquity—in particular, the determination of dominant groups to preserve their power and privileges." Conservatives worship past societies the way liberals worship future ones. "For Christians," by contrast (in Tinder's very H. Richard Niebuhrian formulation), "sin is circumvented only by grace. It is certainly not circumvented by society, the form sinful men and women give to the fallen world." To my mind Tinder's analysis of the gap between Christianity and conservatism is the high point of his book.

And on the whole his book is a useful wake-up call, much like the one Reinhold Niebuhr issued in the late 1930s and 1940s. It is worthwhile to be reminded that Christian responsibility is not like secular responsibility. Christians must act historically but always hold their action under a higher judgment. Civilization needs religion just as the self needs religion, but it is a prophetic faith, one that chastises society and the self for their inevitable complacency. Responsibility means a simultaneous engagement and retrenchment, a willingness to challenge specific injustices in society without embarking on grandiose programs for delivering the world to some imagined state of perfection.

But is it enough today to warn us against utopianism? One gets the sense in reading Tinder that nothing basic has changed since the late 1930s and 1940s. In those years Niebuhr challenged Marxist and liberal hopes for a new society because he thought that in their zeal to transform the world, they forgot about the limits imposed by an imperfect human nature. Today Tinder makes an identical critique of liberation theology. But he should tell us more about how, if at all, his viewpoint speaks to contemporary American liberalism or radicalism. American liberals and leftists are so fragmented and unsure of themselves today that they hardly need to be told to stop being utopian. It would make more sense to instruct them to try believing in politics again. After Vietnam liberals retired *en masse* to what Robert Bellah called their "lifestyle enclaves." It may be that the Niebuhrian message we most need today is not his Depression and wartime appeal to "responsibility"—the reining in of political zeal. What we need most may be his 1920s and early 1930s social idealism, his faith that despite the brokenness of human existence, people actually can gather in public to build new communities. □

OVERWHELMED BUT UNDAUNTED

THE MESSAGE TO THE PLANET
Iris Murdoch
Viking, $22.95, 563pp.

Madeline Marget

Reading *The Message to the Planet*, one can almost feel the world spin. In her latest novel Iris Murdoch once again offers us a profusion of intelligence as she brings to life that safe, eternal England that protects and contains her characters.

Murdoch, whose eye and mind—in this book even more than in previous ones—is everywhere, discourses on Freud, modern medicine and technology, behaviorist psychology, literature, art, and music. Simultaneously, her characters enact facets of love, romance, religious yearning, intellectual activity, sexual dalliance (either accomplished—offstage—or, with furrowed brow, attempted—onstage), form familial groupings and extensions, and partake of sweaty, drunken, companionable pub lunches.

This abundance of information, insight, and observation is overwhelming without being daunting. Reading Murdoch is, above all, fun. The larger world and the world of fictional artifice become one; pithy descriptions of the current and the familiar accompany paragraphs on the cosmic and eternal. Above all, it's always clear something important is going on. The evidence is there: action of mind and body is constant. Everything matters. Everything means something, even though we don't always know what. Events, references, and juxtapositions are often comic, but the jokes in *The Message to the Planet* are hard to isolate. They evolve at least as much from the distance Murdoch's compassion and maturity provide as they do from her sense of the ridiculous, and so we are reminded that the frivolous among us are important, too.

The novel starts, as many of Murdoch's do, with a gaggle of people caught in conversation. In the present-day London of the author's imagination, friends gather to sing, drink, and talk. The historian Alfred Ludens, the ex-priest Gildas Herne, and the painter Jack Sheerwater (as usual in Murdoch, symbolic names and other signposts abound) discuss the presumed-to-be-fatal illness of Patrick Fenman, first characterized as "a wild man from the west of Ireland" but later shown to be extraordinarily tame, whose illness is supposed to have been invoked by a curse.

There is, first, the story of Marcus Vallar, who was once a great mathematician, might be a miracle worker, could be a pathetic madman, and certainly represents the possibility of the highest and most com-

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plete realization of the human spirit. Second, there are the circumstances and quandaries of Franca, an earthy and humane woman given to honest self-examination, whose husband (Jack Sheerwater) torments her not only with his sexual infidelities but also with his effort to gain her collusion in his pretensions about them. As always with Murdoch, the mundane ultimately falls into place in a shower of coincidence, explanation, and revelation that coexists with mystery.

Vallar, brilliantly, broadly, and precociously talented, rich but austere, presently celibate, is, to his friends, and later in the book, to acquaintances and strangers, a mythological figure. To Alfred Ludens in particular, he has religious significance, and is the focus for the hope of an understanding so great that, if attained, it will constitute salvation. Ludens cajoles Marcus to Patrick's bedside in Franca's house, where Vallar apparently cures Patrick through the laying on of hands, despite the remonstrances of a doctor who, anyway—in a typically Murdochian comic aside—later writes a report of the incident for the *Lancet*.

Meanwhile, Marcus's daughter Irina, who variously manifests herself as a hellion, a lost child, a tough, and ultimately as an ordinary person, is sure there's nothing miraculous about her father. She says he's crazy, and therefore she removes him, through subterfuge, to an idyllically situated and luxuriously equipped mental hospital, where the rest of the characters eventually convene.

In this setting (Murdoch has used the same scenery before, though in different forms; as an abbey in *The Bell*, for example) threats and questions grow. There's the danger of thought manipulation: what's Marzillian the psychiatrist really up to? Will the Stone Seekers, a trendy-talking ever-growing crowd of spiritual groupies, damage Marcus, as, hearing of his purported miracle, they switch their allegiance from Stonehenge to him, and encamp claustrophobically on the lawn? Will the Bostonian Maisie, a modern Jamesian feminist, prevail upon miserably unhappy Franca to leave her silly sadist of a husband? Will Ludens marry Irina? And what does the appearance of priests, of a rabbi named Most, of group singing, all mean? Why is there repeated insistence—sometimes pages long—on the struggle to define Jewishness, on the importance of writing?

There are flaws. Some of the characters need clearer, fresher identifications. It's hard, especially in the beginning, to remember who everyone is. And a character shouldn't be obsessed with food simply because he's Jewish. We'd gain more from Murdoch's philosophical disquisitions if she made them shorter, or broke them up more. Still, she deserves praise for the generosity with which she offers her erudition.

It is with a fully drawn serious character that Murdoch best succeeds. Beautiful Franca, who literally lets down her long heavy hair, is the victim of an unhappy childhood and the prisoner of an unjust marriage. Her friends see her as admirable or pitiable, her husband uses her as a convenience, but Murdoch shows her as heroic.

Franca, neither burdened nor leavened with irony, embodies hard-working, self-effacing, honest love, and triumphs. Although she is one of many characters paired off by the end of the story, and she hasn't the agility or learning Murdoch lends other characters, it is her happiness especially that stays in our hearts. Murdoch does not seem skeptical about this character; we are allowed to completely accept the love, given and received, and—more—the spiritual freedom that is Franca's achievement.

Watching Murdoch's ideas and creations whiz by is part of the reliable pleasure her work provides. The other components, however, provide satisfaction beyond entertainment, and seem to come from expansive and admirable authorial ambitions. Part of the enjoyment is cumulative, built on her previous work. Marcus Vallar is the latest in a series of charismatic heroes. He joins Rozanov, the tortured and often unappealing, but believably important subject of *The Philosopher's Pupil*, and David Crimond, the whirling dervish of sex and brains around whom *The Book and the Brotherhood* revolves. In taking great men as her subject, and exploring them at length, Murdoch gives us companions with whom we can happily and profitably dwell, and whose potential, at least, we want to emulate. With Murdoch's exuberance exhilarating us, it seems we can.

Lastly, Murdoch announces, in her title and throughout the book, that she is taking a view fit only for a star. Despite her clues, however, I still don't know exactly what the message is, but it's always—and with this book especially—a joy to zoom around the planet with her. □

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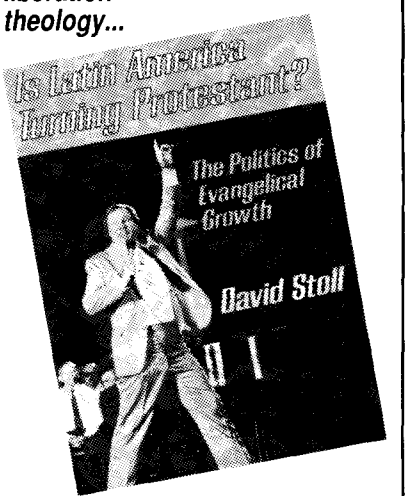

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TAKING OUR MEDICINE

WHAT KIND OF LIFE
The Limits of Medical Progress
Daniel Callahan
Simon & Schuster, $19.95, 318 pp.

Thomas Higgins

The health-care system in America could, with moral justification, consume every dollar thrown at it. It is almost impossible to have too much health care. There are always people, particularly at what Daniel Callahan, the noted medical ethicist, calls "the ragged edge," whose lives can be prolonged or enhanced by the performance of additional medical procedures. Because resources are finite, however, such medicine comes at the expense of other pressing claims on our national treasure, like a decent education and protective services for children.

Callahan confronts the dilemma of too much health care in his newest book *What Kind of Life*, subtitled, *The Limits of Medical Progress*. It may be seen as a companion to his earlier work *Setting Limits: Medical Goals in an Aging Society*. His basic argument is that "Once society has provided the base line of preventive care and public health...it has done most of what ought morally to be required of it." Beyond basic levels of care, he proposes limits on curative medicine.

Such rationing would be accomplished according to a set of standards weighed toward the public interest over individual needs. To Callahan's credit, he is more specific and rigorous in his thinking about those standards than many of his colleagues.

One must perforce agree with much of the analysis and conclusions in this book. Many of us have had elderly relatives whose final days or months were degraded by excessive medical interventions which were neither efficacious nor pain-relieving. We know about low-birth-weight babies whose brief lives supported by intensive care equipment are hell for them and their parents.

Callahan is less persuasive, however, in his dismissal of greater efficiency as a strategy for health cost containment. He says it hasn't worked. There is better evidence that it has not been tried. Instead of cost containment, we have had two decades of cost shifting.

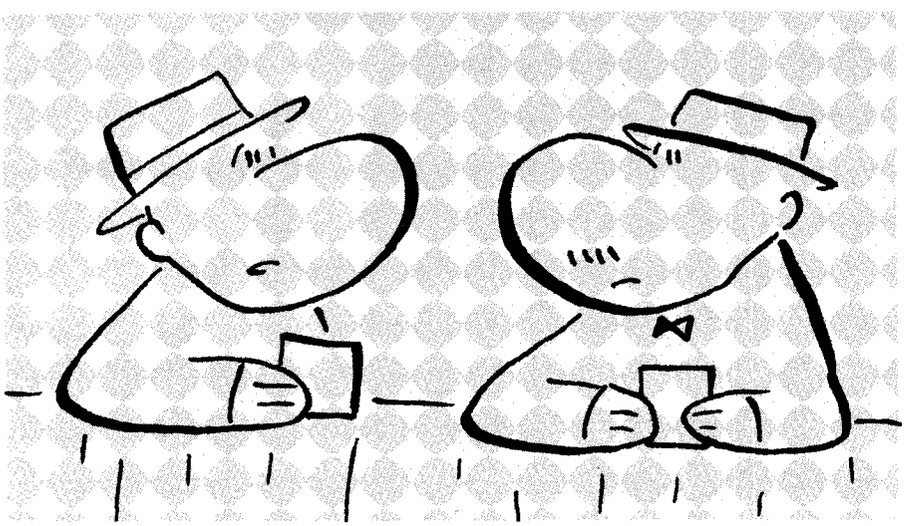
A recent study by the Rand Corporation showed that at least one-third of medical procedures performed in the U.S. are unnecessary and unproductive. The tools to control excess utilization are available. The will to use them has been lacking, but is more likely to be found for improved management than for the degree of rationing Callahan advocates. The implementation of his recommendations would require a paradigm shift in our values, as he acknowledges.

Coby Howard, a twelve-year-old Oregon boy, is a good example of the danger in being too dogmatic about rationing. Callahan writes approvingly about the Oregon experiment, but I find it deeply troubling. Coby needed a life-saving bone marrow transplant because he suffered from leukemia. He was denied the operation, and subsequently died, because the state of Oregon decided that Medicaid would no longer pay for tissue transplants.

Applying such a standard to Medicaid recipients is invidious discrimination on the basis of class, and affects people of color, women, and children disproportionately. It is also singularly unnecessary. By properly applying the results of health outcomes research, we can redirect the resources which go into ineffective medical care, and avoid the necessity of denying the Coby Howards of our society life-saving care. Basing a rationing system on outcomes research would be a welcome improvement in public policy. Following Oregon's experiment, however, is an invitation to inequity.

It is also unclear how Callahan's standards for rationing curative medicine would apply to people with AIDS. Would they have access to AZT if they were Medicaid recipients? It seems doubtful, if I read his standards correctly.

But my quarrel with his thesis is more a matter of degree than kind. Daniel Callahan has written a graceful, if somewhat repetitious book that makes a substantive contribution to our thinking about the legitimate claims of the individual on society, and the unexamined values behind the development of medical technology. In calling attention to our misplaced priorities, he offers a vision that is both wise and compassionate for addressing the most pressing domestic problem of our time. □



"I was going to have a heart transplant, but my insurance company rejected it."

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ENGINEERING CONSENT

THE ROCKETS' RED GLARE
When America Goes to War,
The Presidents & the People
Richard J. Barnet
Simon & Schuster, $24.95, 476 pp.

Christian Appy

In case Germany attacks, better lay in some liquor. According to the Committee on Public Information, in a widely distributed pamphlet of 1917, German invaders will "demand wine for the officers and beer for the men. Angered to find that an American town does not contain large quantities of either, they pillage and burn...."

This warning was part of a massive propaganda campaign not to sell alcohol but to persuade the American people that fighting in the Great War, a war the government had previously portrayed as a senseless, Old World struggle, had become democracy's moral imperative. It is also the stuff of Richard Barnet's lively narrative history of foreign policy and public opinion over the last two centuries as the United States moved from newly independent republic with a a six-ship navy to global superpower with thousands of nuclear warheads.

Barnet is a senior fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., and a frequent contributor to the *New Yorker*. He has written eleven books, primarily about the exercise of American power since World War II. His best-known works include: *The Roots of War* (1972)—a brilliant critique of the "national security managers" and institutions that led America into Vietnam; *Global Reach* (1975)—a study of the vast power wielded by multinational corporations; and *The Alliance* (1983)—a history of America's postwar relations with Western Europe and Japan. *The Rockets' Red Glare* is Barnet's first crack at a broad survey of American history.

Don't be fooled by the title. This is a political, not a military, history. The "red glare" is not a flash of battle, but the hyperbole of political rhetoric (as in "red *scare*"). Barnet calls his book "an inquiry into the mysterious role of public opnion in the choice of war and peace." But where's the mystery? After all, the public, as Barnet persuasively shows, has had little or no choice in the making of foreign policy.

"For two hundred years the managers of United States foreign policy have looked upon the American people as a lawyer regards a difficult client who gets in the way of the case." Thanks to elections, however, American leaders have tried ever harder to monitor and manage their clients' opinions. Hoping to "engineer consent," the executive branch treats foreign policy "as a commodity to be sold rather than as a set of inescapably controversial ideas to be debated and understood."

The mystery, I suppose, is that the public does not always buy the government's foreign policy sound bites. For example, throughout the 1980s, under an administration (Barnet claims) that did more than any in our history to manipulate public opinion, the majority of Americans opposed its policies in Central America. The fact that these policies continued anyway is not heartening to seekers of a more democratic foreign policy. But Barnet finds consolation in the public's role as spoiler. However impotent citizens may be to *make* policy, they can place checks on its *execution*. For example, Barnet credits public opposition with shortening the Korean and Vietnam wars, preventing a wider war in Central America, and pushing Reagan toward nuclear arms reduction.

Academic historians, notoriously scrupulous about other people's research, may complain that Barnet bases most of this book on secondary sources. But it hardly can be otherwise in a work of this scope. Besides, he has a keen eye for the archival gems collected by others; a virtue, along with an able pen, that makes this a far more interesting and readable volume than many in the genre.

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However, Barnet's history covers so much ground, and is so jam-packed with detail, it takes some raking to get at the key points. In his version of American history, public opinion doesn't start wars, presidents do. In 1812, for example, it was President Madison's judgment, not the "ebb and flow of popular feeling," that produced the war Barnet nominates as America's second most unpopular (behind Vietnam). The war against Mexico was triggered by President Polk and the public was simply asked to support a fait accompli. And while Barnet finds considerable public support to liberate Cuba from Spanish imperial control in 1898, the simultaneous effort to grab the Philippines came "before the people had a chance to assess what they were doing, much less reject it."

Barnet offers sensible opposition to the claim that public "war fever" typically drove the U.S. into battle. His arguments persuade because he does not exaggerate either the depth of antiwar activism or the level of public knowledge about foreign affairs. Instead, Barnet smartly points out that even common assumptions about the world can produce significantly different courses of action.

For example, Barnet concedes that most nineteenth-century Americans supported some westward expansion. But the idea that America should lay claim to the entire continent was by no means a majority view at the time it was being pushed in Washington. And while most Americans in the 1940s and 1950s were surely anti-Communist, it is unlikely that they would have tolerated so great a military build-up, so global a policy of containment, or so vicious a campaign of witch hunts, had there not been such a concerted effort from the top down to "scare the hell out of the country" as Senator Vandenberg recommended to Truman in 1947.

"Public opinion" is indeed a complex matter and Richard Barnet has not fully plumbed its mysteries, or taken into account such variables as region, class, gender, and ethnicity. He is most penetrating when analyzing his most familiar subject—the upper reaches of the American government. He teaches us more about how our leaders have *perceived* public opinion, and sought to control it, than about the views of the people themselves. But this informative and accessible survey can surely inform a broad public whose opinions our leaders have so long disdained. □

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WAISTBANDS & EPIPHANIES

THE KNEELING BUS
Beverly Coyle
Houghton Mifflin: Ticknor & Fields, $18.95, 184 pp.

Peggy R. Ellsberg

The eight interlocking stories in this gentle, hilarious first novel are told in the voice of a child (Carrie) growing up in Methodist parsonages in rural Florida. The time is the 1950s, and there is no air conditioning. In the intense heat of an Everglades summer, even the cars move slowly through the little towns, and the streets ring "with no sound at all." Ladies carry hankies trimmed with crochet to dab their faces.

Carrie's father is charming, liberal, and vague; Caroline, her mother—once president of her college sorority—has become accustomed to a life of church socials, relying on conversational responses like "Oh dear me!" and refusing to look at the glossy ads for luxury items in women's magazines. The Willis family is easily distracted by the events of Boynton Beach: a parishioner wishes to be baptized by immersion in the Atlantic Ocean at the Easter Sunrise Service. Carrie is obsessively interested. She cross-examines Martha, the Baptist preacher's daughter, in the mango grove that separates the two parsonages. Carrie's mother, characteristically, tries to smooth over the whole affair at Palm Sunday dinner by discussing it reasonably. "My mother," Carrie says, "might as well have been speaking in tongues."

The Kneeling Bus is composed with an original and even unique artfulness. The intimate, demotic Southern dialogues moving toward revelation recall Flannery O'Connor; some of the characters—like Old Man Wilcox in his smelly undershirt—could have appeared in a story by Faulkner. And there are certain Kierkegaardian repetitions—Carrie's sister Jeanie, packing for summer camp, runs upstairs for her medicine; Carrie's mother sews herself a red cape like the one worn by the fashionable Mrs. Garrison. Later in the novel, we discover that Jeanie is dangerously asthmatic, and the incident of the medicine falls into place. Later still, a teen-ager teases Caroline for looking like Little Red Riding Hood. These details would have interested some of Walker Percy's characters.

But Beverly Coyle does something original. She weaves several plots together—usually three of them—and somehow they illuminate a final spiritual tableau of extraordinary wisdom. In "The Seventh Day," Carrie goes to the pet store in the simmering heat to buy a lime-green parakeet, and her

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beloved grandmother visits, having converted to Seventh-Day Adventism. Carrie has a box in which she keeps a newspaper photo of the petshop keeper posing with a new mahogany Philco TV, some paper cigar rings, and a lock of her grandmother's hair. This story, splicing all the ends of these minor details of a summer's day, concludes with thickening tension, unexpected meaning, and escalating beauty.

In "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing," Coyle creates a pacifist schoolteacher who "practices celibacy" and "was the only World War II conscientious objector in Florida," a bizarre boy who raises leeches by giving them rubber gloves full of blood from the butchershop, and a pair of girl's underpants whose frayed waistband comes unpinned while Carrie is bearing her tray through the school cafeteria. "In one second," she says, "my warm panties had landed on the tops of my shoes and shackled me at the ankles." A sympathetic teacher comforts Carrie by telling of the time that the same thing happened to her, and how she had just stepped out of them and kept on walking. But the Methodist child could not fathom this—"the deception it would have taken to pretend my own panties had not even belonged to me." The chapter ends with a really funny scene and a brief, transcendent reflection on war.

Ms. Coyle's technique is revealed by one of her own characters, the muck farmer Mr. Gray. In a chapter that describes the muck farmer, a wealthy orchid grower's devastating tragedy, and Carrie's decision (while receiving a polio shot) to become a missionary, we read: "One time when Mr. Gray was a boy, he and his cousins had caught live rats to take over to Mr. Wilcox's place to feed a teen-age size alligator the old man kept in his bathtub. 'Of all the carrying on,' Mr. Gray said, recalling the alligator trying to catch that rat inside a slippery tub. He was a laconic man. In one sentence he'd have hoisted up a bloody scene—the smeared porcelain walls, the thwacks of the alligator's tail...." *The Kneeling Bus* in a sentence or a page hoists up a scene, a climate, a personality, a fragrance, an epiphany.

In the final, revelatory chapter, twenty-five or thirty years have passed and Carrie's elderly mother visits her in Greenwich Village. Having her mother there makes Carrie "homesick right there in my own apartment." Her mother has inherited land in Florida right next door to Disneyworld, which is worth a fortune. Bewildered and not entirely pleased with her wealth, the mother has remained simple, restrained, and Methodist. Walking down Bleecker Street, Carrie inadvertently stops at a bus stop, tearfully pleading with her mother to sell the land and buy real estate in Manhattan. The M-5 bus pulls up. It kneels, "a large humble elephant of forgiveness and servitude," and Carrie's frail, confused mother climbs on. The old Southern woman makes genteel conversation with the bus driver while Carrie tries to recover from her agonies about real estate. And suddenly, her mother's thin hair catches the light and turns into a halo. Otherworldly, distracted, and indifferent, "She was lit up from the inside...and any day now she was going to scoot on through that gate. She was going to scoot on through, leaving me here on the other side, loaded down and damned if I knew what I was going to do before I had to strip right down to the bone and follow after her." □

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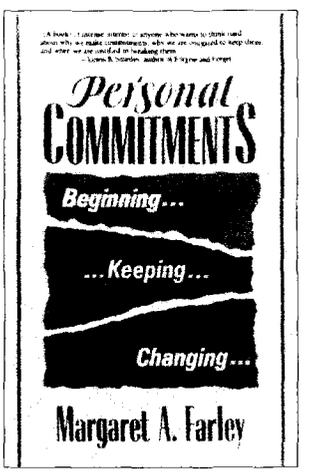

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THE CRACK OF THE BAT

DIAMONDS IN THE ROUGH
The Untold History of Baseball
Joel Zoss and John Bowman
Macmillan, $29.95, 480 pp.

Thomas E. Brinkman, Jr.

Not too long ago, baseball's off-season resembled Lent: a time when the faithful endured a fast from their favorite pastime in anticipation of the rebirth of "spring training." Nowadays, however, the off-season seems more like penance. Beyond the known suffering of enduring other less enjoyable offerings such as football, basketball, hockey, etc., we now must go through $3 million salary disputes and labor negotiations.

Luckily, baseball has always had a deep history of literature—statistical, anecdotal, biographical, and encyclopedic—for the fan to fall back upon in his or her hour of need. Joel Zoss and John Bowman's recent addition to the encyclopedic area of that literature, *Diamonds in the Rough*, is an attempt to show how thoroughly baseball has permeated our culture, mostly through myths, and how inaccurate these myths can be. *Diamonds* even challenges the accepted notion of who invented the game. It was not Abner Doubleday of Cooperstown.

While salaries and labor negotiations, drug usage, and racism may offend us today, you will come to learn that these problems and more have been with the sport since its inception. But more intriguing than that will be the exposure of baseball's adopted birthright. Baseball is the national pastime, but it was derived from an English schoolgirl's game called rounders. Doubleday had nothing, and I mean nothing, to do with it.

Despite, or because of the perpetration of this false claim, baseball pervades every aspect of American culture. Literature, art, music, film, and theater have all contributed and remarked upon America's passion for its favorite game. Add the effect baseball has upon television, advertising, and collectibles, and the influence is amazing. As a matter of fact, while $350 million was spent on major league tickets last year, $1.1 billion was spent on new and used baseball cards during the same time.

Worldwide, ninety countries have sanctioned baseball leagues. And, while gunboat diplomacy spawned many of these leagues, most notably in Japan, Cuba, and Nicaragua, the 1992 Summer Olympics will designate baseball as its twenty-fifth medal sport.

While the authors exhaust every topic that baseball has touched tremendously or marginally, their style is extremely readable. Like a great hurler who mixes up his pitches, the authors shift their subchapters deftly between statistics, biography, and anecdotes to give the reader nearly everything he or she asks for.

I did find two editorial errors in the volume and this might call into question other stated facts. But I am a fan who thoroughly enjoyed this walk through my favorite sport; a fan who each winter cannot wait until the suffering occasioned by life without baseball ends. PLAY BALL! □

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 306)

only five of the other signers; yet I feel a wonderful *sacred* bond with all 4,505. It's the most wonderful feeling of belonging that I've ever had.

To give you an idea of what kind of *Commonweal* reader would respond in this way, herewith a brief profile. I'm a seventy-two-year-old mother of nine sons and daughters and grandmother of fifteen. I'm a convert to Roman Catholicism, having been a Georgia-bred Southern Baptist. For ten years I have belonged to a small faith community which gathers at Manresa-on-Severn for liturgy. I've been a lay Carmelite for forty years; my deceased husband was a Franciscan tertiary—we talked of our "mixed marriage." Because of an illness which my doctor calls "degenerative and debilitating"—and he ain't kidding—I can't get out much, so I read all the time—*Pax Christi Quarterly, Catholic Worker, America, Commonweal, NCR, Cross Currents*, and the *Newsletter* published by the Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church (ARCC).

By signing, I'm saying, "Hear us, good bishops, we're losing confidence in your leadership." I certainly do not expect to see much change in my lifetime, but I'll keep signing. Maybe we'll have married priests, maybe not. I rather like the ARCC suggestion of women "priestesses," with an entirely different role from men. Speaking of *sacred*, doesn't it seem strange that because women cannot be priests, hundreds, perhaps thousands of Catholics are denied the Eucharist?

KATHARINE M. ROCK

A valid covenant

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: Emanuel Thorne is indeed acting quite properly in reminding us Catholics of our too often lamentable history in dealing with the Jewish people and of the consequences of our beliefs as these touch upon Judaism [March 9]. As Catholics, we can only be grateful for such reminders, however sharp. For as Pope John Paul II has said in addressing the Jews of Warsaw, in the perspective of the Holocaust, "today, this nation of Israel has become a loud warning voice for all humanity. More than anyone else, it is precisely you who have become this saving warning. In this sense you continue your particular vocation, showing yourselves to be still the heirs of that election to which God is faithful" (June 14, 1987).

Still, a couple of points may be raised with reference to Dr. Thorne's article by way of clarification. First, the August 2 discourse by the pope was part of a much longer series on Pentecost that began months before and went on weeks after.

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Its intent, as even the Anti-Defamation League, which originally raised the concern, acknowledged some weeks later, was in no way to denigrate Judaism or to call into question what the pope has consistently called God's "irrevocable" covenant with the Jewish people. In summarizing the biblical prophets and in citing Jeremiah 31, only the positive notion of the validity of God's covenant with the church through Christ was meant, not any negative understanding of the ongoing validity of God's covenant with the Jewish people, which continues to be affirmed by the church as part of its own "essential" teaching (1985 Vatican "Notes"), as the pope has time and again stated.

Secondly, while there is great beauty in the prayer of reparation ascribed to Pope John XXIII, especially in its last clause which echoes the teaching of the Roman Catechism of the Council of Trent, most scholars today doubt that the pope actually composed it. EUGENE J. FISHER

The writer is director for Catholic-Jewish Relations in the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, NCCB.

A countercritique

Boston, Mass.

To the Editors: I feel that I have had this letter in my mind for months now, indeed, perhaps since I began my subscription to *Commonweal* over a year ago. But Fred Siegel's "Blissed Out and Loving It" [February 9] finally moved me to write.

His warnings about the increasing privatization of American culture—among other insights—need to be heard, not only by Americans in general, but by American Catholics in particular. For in the midst of all the praise of "inculturation," together with the "Rome-bashing" that seems so prevalent, there seems to be little serious counter-critique, one which Mr. Siegel, and which I think many of your own editorials, provide. As John Kane recently remarked in *Cross Currents* [Summer, 1989], there seems to be little sense among Catholics of "the extent to which popular liberal ideology has taken hold in some Catholic circles...[and] the extent to which it functions to screen reality and hinder thought."

Your magazine continues to bring, for this reader at least, an antidote of clear thinking to many of the issues that continue to face us American Catholics.

VINCENT MASI

Death & dignity

Buffalo, N.Y.

To the Editors: Daniel Callahan's call for a reshaping of U.S. health-care priorities continues with "The Primacy of Caring" [February 23]. In arguing that once the basic need of preventive care and public health are met, society's only duty is to care for, not cure, each individual, he is heading into stiff winds of prevailing norms.

Callahan's proposed obligation to care can contradict the wishes of the patient him/herself, who may desire any possible intervention to prolong life. This limiting of patient autonomy, a central tenet of contemporary medical ethics, begs the question: how can human dignity in each individual be respected if the individual's

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capacity for self-determination is circumscribed?

I am sympathetic to Callahan's position, however. As a health-care manager I see patients and families often unable or unwilling to confront the inexorable death process. Most providers, although they know when to acknowledge that "the jig is up," usually define caring precisely as carrying out the wishes of the patient, family, or state. The patient's desires dictate, and fear of liability reinforces.

For Callahan's "obligation to care" to work, patients and providers must cease to rely on experts to "do" ethics, and start to teach morality themselves. Callahan teaches that we do die. Autonomy is not the measure of human dignity; it can be realized and protected only in community. Fear—including that of death—is intrinsic to existence, corrupts dignity, and is allayed only by relational caring. This fear, and our ability to teach, learn, and care, play out in a world of sicker friends and more complex interventions as the stuff of life.

CHRISTOPHER F. KOLLER

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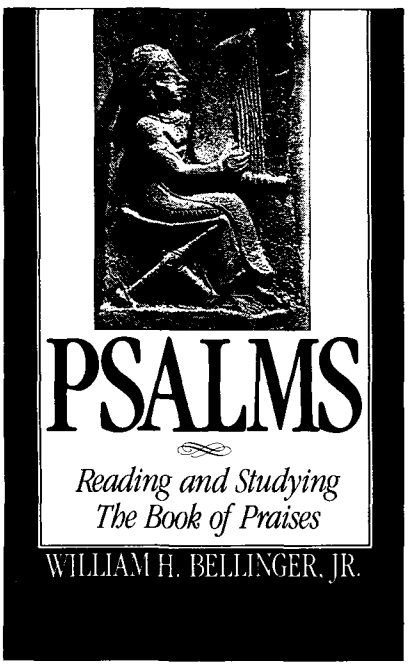

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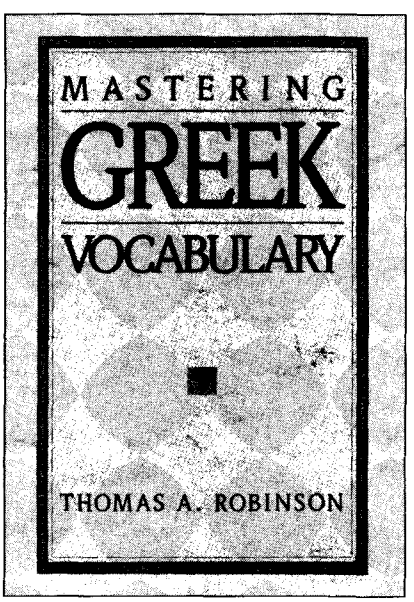

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